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## Pursued to the Altar.

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### CHAPTER I.

ONLY A POOR CLERK.

BERYL WARD at eighteen was called the belle of Chicago. Not that there were not plenty of beautiful girls in that great, gay, growing city—belles by the dozen, each with her own peculiar claims to the champion-belt of girlish supremacy. But Beryl's claims were, perhaps, more widely acknowledged than those of any other, on two accounts: first and foremost, her exquisite loveliness—secondly, her father's position.

Anthony Ward was not only one of Chicago's wealthiest men, but he was also a leader in poli-

tics, and expected, in due time, to be a member of the Senate of the United States.

He kept open house in sumptuously generous style; and traded a little, too, on the capital of his only daughter's wit and charms. To this latter selfishness of his may be charged all the trouble which arose in the Ward family, without which there would have been little material for this story.

Beryl came eighteen on the 10th of February, 1871—the year of the great fire, but months and months before that disastrous event. Her father gave her a party to which one thousand invitations were sent out; and he made arrangements for the comfort and enjoyment of the full number. There were to be guests from every adjoining city and State—from Cincinnati, Detroit, Toledo, Cleveland, Buffalo—a few from New York, twenty or thirty from Washington, seven or eight from Baltimore, a dozen from Philadelphia; for, while this was the birthday and coming-out party of his daughter, it was also a political instrument to be deftly used by

Anthony Ward. We have nothing to do with his machinations except to state, at the outset, that he was determined to marry Beryl to Norman Bristow, a rich bachelor of thirty-five, who had great influence with his party in the State and city; that Beryl knew nothing of this cruel determination, and was fathoms deep in love with Fennel Gray, one of her father's clerks; and that Mr. Ward was utterly unsuspicious of this infatuation on her part.

No private mansion—even in Chicago—could be expected to accommodate one thousand guests, and, at first, Mr. Ward thought of engaging the Palmer House; but changed his mind and arranged things in this fashion:

At the side of his house, and behind it, in L-shape, was a large garden, crowded in summer with the rarest flowers. He caused the whole of this ground to be floored, walled and roofed. Where trees or shrubs intervened, he floored around them, and they were left to form part of the decoration of the place. Gas-jets were introduced; and the space was divided into two



"MR. BRISTOW, PRAY, LET ME SPEAK! OH, PLEASE LET GO MY HAND! MY FATHER CANNOT GIVE ME AWAY WITHOUT MY CONSENT."

vast apartments—ball-room and supper-room. The ball-room ended in a fine conservatory which stood at the bottom of the garden. The rough walls and ceiling were draped with soft blue and French-gray muslin, which, in its turn, was nearly hidden by hundreds of brilliant, blossoming American flags, large trees and shrubs in pots and banks of delicious roses, camellias and flowering plants. The whole place was like a bit of gorgeous June, taken out of some tropic country and set down in that bleak lake region.

The center of the supper-room was occupied by a mimic iceberg, made of real ice in the most fantastic shapes, that glittered and sparkled in the flood of light, forming an enchanted spectacle, with smilax here and there clinging to it, and red roses peeping out of its crevices. About this unique center-piece the tables were arranged. It is hardly necessary to say that the most famous caterers had made these all that the fancy of a gourmand could desire.

In the house proper every room was thrown open—a suit of three on either side of the broad hall—a long drawing-room and music-room on one side, on the other a library, parlor, and a lovely boudoir made out of the dining-room.

Exquisite flowers, exquisite music, golden floods of light everywhere!

The first part of the evening Beryl stood by her father's side at the head of the drawing-room receiving their throngs of friends.

A convention of poets and artists, each doing his best toward it, could hardly give you a true picture of Beryl Ward as she stood there, that evening, just eighteen. How, then, can we do it? We cannot.

We can tell you that she wore a dress from Worth's, white, clinging, complicated, wonderful, showing the palest pink and straw-color roses crumpled and delicate, amid a foam of lace and lisse; that her jewels were pearls and diamonds set by Tiffany; that her fan and bouquet and slippers matched her dress and her ornaments. We can tell you that she had dark-brown hair, soft, silky and rippling, with little infantine rings of it clinging to her white forehead—hazel eyes, very dark and lustrous—cheeks of the purest oval, colored like two wild roses, a faint, clear pink—lips fresh and delicious, dimpled at the corners of the sweet mouth—a white neck and lovely arms, with a figure of medium height, rounded into girlish symmetry. All this is mere outline. How paint the flash of wit or the shadow of tenderness in the eyes under those long lashes? How describe the wavering of the wild-rose color—the smile that came or went—the hundred charming airs and ways of one who knows she is beautiful and happy, young and beloved—and well-dressed!

Beryl Ward was as little vain as a girl could be under the circumstances, which is not saying that she was ignorant of her fascinations. She had been petted and flattered from babyhood; only her own warm, loving nature had prevented her being utterly spoiled.

It was ten o'clock before Beryl felt at liberty to desert her station as hostess and enjoy a dance. Then she entered the fairy ball-room on the arm of Norman Bristow, a tall, handsome, imperious man, whose lightest attention the girls of Chicago considered an honor. They stood together at the head of the flower-wreathed room while the sets were forming, he, bold, proud, successful, ambitious; she, young, lovely, happy, and fair.

None could look at them, standing side by side, without thinking what a match it would be, if the two should fall in love with each other. Fennel Gray could not deny it, as almost as much alone in that brilliant assemblage as if in a wilderness—he leaned against a banner-twined column, watching them with a sick heart and bitter envy.

He wished that he had not been so foolish as to come.

Anthony Ward had kindly invited the most respectable and intelligent of his clerks and accountants to the grand ball.

As the moth circles about the candle Fennel had come, knowing that he should scorch his wings and gain for himself pain and despair. It was as far from his hope as heaven from earth that Beryl Ward should love him. True, he had saved her life that time when the yacht capsized out on the lake last summer; but any common sailor would have done that as well, and she had never told him that she was particularly grateful.

As he stood, pale and solitary by the column, he was not even sharp enough to discover that Miss Ward was aware of his presence; yet she had given him one swift and flashing glance

when she entered the ball-room; and was as conscious of him as he was of her.

"Poor, poor, dear boy!" she thought, and, very unreasonably, this pity for Fennel made her dislike the gallant, smooth, prosperous gentleman bending over her with such suave assurance of his own powers of pleasing.

All through the stately quadrille Fennel watched only her and her partner.

"Nobody dances with *him*!" Beryl was thinking, as she smiled and chatted with Norman Bristow, "so, I shall have to dance with him myself. I'll do it, before long, see if I don't! I wonder if he waltzes?"

Crowds of the young eligibles of the aristocracy were waiting to beg for a dance with Miss Ward. It was a long time before she could make opportunity to carry out her whim. At last she found herself stranded beside the melancholy clerk.

"You have not danced once, Mr. Gray."

"How do you know, Miss Ward?"

"Oh, I have had an eye on you."

"I know none of these glittering creatures, Miss Ward; and, if I did, it would be presumption for me to ask the favor of them."

"Ask it of me, Mr. Gray? Come! Do you like the round dances? This is my favorite of all the Strauss waltzes. Oh, come! the music has got into my feet so that they will not keep still."

She held out her little white hand; he took it, his arm slipped about the plastic waist, her flower-like face smiled up into his, her witching eyes sent up rays of glory into his own; the delicious music throbbed like his own blood through every fiber of his being; he forgot the crowd, forgot that he was a poor clerk, forgot there was a bitter yesterday and a wretched tomorrow—he held the sweet girl whom he loved in a tender, pure, supporting clasp, as they glided and circled to the palpitating measure, and his spirits arose and floated gloriously like thistle-down struck through with sunshine.

His movements were easy and graceful; Beryl had never danced so long without fatigue, and she was as happy to waltz with him as he to have her.

There was a third person happy at the sight, too; and that was Thalia Conyngham. Thalia had set her heart upon becoming mistress of the handsome establishment of Norman Bristow. She was an ambitious girl, bound to make a brilliant marriage. Love did not enter into the question settled in her mind—that she wanted an elegant home and a husband who commanded a high position. Mr. Bristow suited her ideas.

Sharp and subtle, she pierced, in one evening, the plans of their host and discovered that he was bound to make a match between his lovely young daughter and Mr. Bristow—saw that Bristow admired Beryl—that her own plans were in danger.

Jealous and alarmed, it was a relief to her to observe this little side-play between Beryl and her father's clerk.

"The little fool is in love with him!" she laughed to herself. "I must draw Mr. Bristow's attention to that fact!" and she proceeded to do so, immediately.

Norman Bristow drew down his black brows, sending a subtle look, from half-closed eyes, at the young couple, while the lips under his waxed mustache curled into a faint sneer; but Miss Conyngham gained nothing by her malice—he almost turned his back upon her, and she felt that he had seen through her motive, and given her "the cold shoulder."

She bit her lips with vexation and was glad when she was asked to dance, though the one who led her out was a person she would not have hesitated to refuse had she not been in haste to leave Mr. Bristow.

When she had gone Bristow stole another look at Beryl and her partner, still floating airy about the great room. He was vexed, but not greatly so. He cared no more for the clerk's fancy for the millionaire's daughter than he did for the rose which had dropped from some beauty's hair which his foot had accidentally crushed. He expected dozens of men to be in love with Miss Ward. He was not jealous of them. Why should he be? He smiled slightly as he asked himself the question—a smile of conscious power. He, too, had fathomed Anthony Ward's game—knew the price he, Bristow, was expected to pay for the daughter's hand—and was willing enough to pay it.

For, Norman Bristow, when he first led Beryl out to open the ball, had made up his mind that he wanted her for his wife; and he was a man not used to giving up what he had decided upon. People often said "Fortune favored him," but it was not the favor of the fickle goddess which

gave him what he was resolved to have—it was the persistency of his will.

Beryl might like to waltz with that good-looking clerk—let her have her waltz out—but she was going to marry him!

## CHAPTER II.

### THE VISITOR WHO CAME UNBIDDEN.

THALIA CONYNGHAM had a will, too. Where the man had egotism, she had cunning. She was sorry in a moment that she had betrayed her spite to Norman Bristow. She felt that she must move more cautiously before so astute a person, whose glance could be so sarcastic. But she did not relinquish her plans; she hugged them the more tightly.

"I must know this Fennel Gray," she said to herself. "It is true I have not the honor to number a clerk among my friends, but it is not too late to do so. I will ask Beryl to introduce him."

Scarcely had she completed the "Lanciers," which followed the exquisite waltz the young couple had danced together, than she managed to get near Beryl, and to say:

"I do wish you would get me for a partner the young gentleman you waltzed with last! He is the best dancer I ever saw! I am sure I shall enjoy a round dance with him! Who is he, anyhow? Is he from New York?"

"Oh, no, Thalia. I am afraid you will be shocked when I tell you he keeps papa's books."

"Really? I should not have dreamed of it! He is awfully handsome, anyway, and dances like an angel. Do, do introduce him! You know I am not so exclusive as some girls."

Beryl lifted her pretty eyebrows in surprise; she had thought Miss Conyngham the haughtiest girl of her acquaintance; it pleased her, though, to find that "poor Fennel" was being appreciated, and she beckoned him to her side, mentioned his name to her friend, and saw him take Thalia by the hand and join the whirl of couples who were circling about to the melting measure.

The next moment she, herself, was gliding about with Mr. Bristow, who certainly danced well, and who murmured graceful nothings in her ear as he bent his dark, glowing eyes to her own. She felt his power without knowing what it was that alarmed and repelled her.

As for Fennel Gray, he could scarcely credit the evidence of his senses, and believe that he was actually moving in that distinguished company supporting the stately form of Miss Conyngham, meeting her sweet smile, and half-blinded by the flash of her diamonds. The whole world had changed for him—his life—his prospects—in the last half-hour. He was madly—foolishly, dangerously happy. Beryl had been so kind, so gentle to him; their eyes had met in that dazzling look of soul to soul; it seemed as if she had allowed him to see that she returned his love! The mystery, the bliss, the enchantment of it was about him like a magic web.

And Miss Conyngham had sent for him to be introduced to her! He did not like her—did not care for the honor she did him, except as it appeared to open to him the doors of that great world which had heretofore been closed against him. In that light, it seemed to bring him nearer to Beryl.

The young lady was very affable; she danced with him for some time; and, when that was over, held him by her side for several moments in pleasant conversation. She was very handsome, magnificently dressed, one of the queens of the room. A red rose dropped out of her belt; he stooped to restore it to her; she bade him keep it as a reminder of the waltz they had enjoyed together, and of her dear friend Beryl's birthday party.

"She is looking lovely to-night, is she not? Do not think you are the only one who knows it, Mr. Gray! Admire her while you may. The rose that all are praising' will soon be gathered. Mr. Bristow has made up his mind to abjure bachelorhood—so great are the charms of Miss Ward and her million—and when Norman Bristow makes up his mind the matter is settled for all! Look at them now! Well-paired, are they not? Mark my prediction, Mr. Gray!—when we meet to celebrate her next birthday, it will be Mrs. Bristow's health we will drink. Her father is bent upon it—for political reasons. But, why do I retail this gossip to you? This ball-room is a triumph of art, isn't it? I never before saw anything quite so fine in its way. Ah, there is Mr. Sheridan coming to take me to supper! I promised to go with him. *Au revoir*, Mr. Gray. Take care of the rose I gave you."

Did he bow, or did he not, as the careless beauty moved away on the arm of a stranger? He never knew. What did it matter? The magic web was shivered into shreds—the en-

chantment had given place to dull reality—he was ill, desolate, stricken—an alien in that gay, babbling, jeweled throng—his heart was a dead thing in his bosom.

Beryl went by, step by step, with Norman Bristow, marching to the music of Wagner's Bridal March, to the supper-room. She gave him a soft, wistful glance as she passed, noting his pallor. Her companion gave him a look, too—a look which stung like a blow with nettles, so cold, contemptuous and triumphant.

The music clashed out joyously; the well-dressed throng floated by; the banners shone in red and white; the flowers gave out their sweetest, dying breath, while Fennel shrunk back behind the drapery of a pillar, angry and sad, feeling himself, more than ever, only a poor clerk! Feasting and dancing were not for such as him—the wine was near his lip, but it was the cup of Tantalus. He would not break the bread nor eat the salt of those who despised him, and he made his way out of the splendid ball-room, through the suit of half-deserted parlors.

Fennel stood a little while looking at a lovely picture of Beryl painted the previous summer—Beryl, in a white muslin dress and red roses—then, with a heavy sigh, quitted the gorgeous scene where he felt himself so little at home. The wintry air of the street struck revivingly on his heated face, and he looked up at the great stars with longing eyes. Were there snobs in those heavenly planets, too?

As he came down the steps his foot struck something lying neaped at the bottom of them. To his dismay he discovered that what he had thought to be a dog curled up there, was a woman.

The poor creature lay huddled at the foot of those marble steps just as she sunk after being thrust out of the house. She had not been there many moments, yet she was already half insensible—the icy wind which blew from off the great lakes and went shrieking through the city avenues fast chilling her to the heart.

"Who is there? What are you doing here?" called young Gray, stooping and shaking the woman by the shoulder.

She lifted her head with a faint moan.

"What are you doing here?" he repeated. "You will perish. Get up. Where do you belong? Are you drunk?"

"Drunk? Yes, with misery."

He was astonished at this reply, spoken in a refined voice, with an accent of indescribable suffering. There was no affectation about that voice!—his sympathies were at once excited by it.

"You are getting chilled. You must not lie here. What can I do for you? Have you no place to sleep?"

"I suppose I can go to the station-house. I'm not sleepy. I dare say they have plenty to eat here, where they are celebrating the young lady's birthday; if you could bring me a biscuit, sir—I have not tasted food for thirty-six hours."

Fennel's dollars were hard-earned, but he ran back up the steps and forced a dollar bill into a policeman's hand, asking him to go to the kitchen and get a cup of coffee and sandwich, and hand them out the area door. He then half dragged, half urged the stranger into the area, where they were partially sheltered from the keen wind, removing his overcoat to place it about her shoulders. He obtained the hot coffee and some food, although the policeman looked doubtfully at such irregular proceedings.

"It's a woman, half starved; I'll see that she does no harm," Fennel explained, and the officer, who knew Mr. Ward's bookkeeper by sight, made no serious objection, beyond muttering that "he ought to be too cute to be took in by one o' them tramps."

"She shall not trouble you, O'Brien; I will take her home with me, and have mother give her a bed to-night."

"Very well, Mr. Gray; only look sharp after your valuables."

"Will your mother really shelter me?" asked the poor creature, eagerly. "Oh, sir, I am so glad! I have never slept in a station-house; I should dread to herd with the women there!" and she shuddered. "I have never been in quite such extremity as this before; but it took every cent that I had to bring me on from New York to Chicago—I dared not spend anything for food on the way—and I was obliged to come—on important business. I expected to have come into the city by noon, but it was after nine this evening when the train arrived—too late to see the person who would have let me have some money. So I came to the house, here, where I learned he was attending a party,

intending to stay about until he came out; but the cold was greater than I realized, and I was getting numb and stupid, I think."

The warm drink and food revived her incredibly. She could talk fast enough now, in a low, pleasant voice, which prepossessed Fennel in her favor, though he had but a dim view of her face.

"For whom were you waiting, may I ask?"

"For Norman Bristow," she answered him, almost in a whisper.

The young man had forgotten his own sorrow in that of another for a few moments; at sound of that name it rushed back upon him in a bitter, surging flood.

"Ah?"

"You know him, and you do not like him," said the stranger, with a sigh.

"That will not prevent my doing you a service, madame. It will be late before he leaves this place—four or five o'clock, at the least. You had better come home with me, and see Mr. Bristow to-morrow."

"I will be only too glad to do so, sir, if you think your mother will be willing to let me stay. I can lie by the kitchen stove—"

"Come on, then; it is growing colder every minute."

"Because I have your coat. Please put it on again! Indeed, I cannot walk with such an incumbrance, and I shall be warm enough while I am moving."

They went out onto the pavement, and Fennel Gray gave this unknown beggar his arm, for they could walk faster thus, and bore up her feeble steps when fierce blasts from around street-corners nearly swept her from her feet.

A walk of half a mile brought them to a small white frame house in the suburbs, standing in a tiny garden of its own; an humble cottage of a house, one of twenty similar dwellings in Sylvan Row—the decent and comfortable homes of people on small salaries, who preferred to keep their Lares and Penates all to themselves, be the shrine ever so modest, than to herd in "tenements."

Fennel softly opened the front door with his latch-key.

"There is no need to disturb mother to-night," he whispered. "Come in here," leading the way into a sitting-room where there was a fire in a stove, and a lamp left burning on the table. "I will warn her, in the morning, that you are here. Do not go away until I see you. I want you to have breakfast first."

"Thank you, sir. You are very kind."

"You can use this lounge for a bed; here is my coat to put over you. With the fire, you will keep comfortable."

"Ok, yes, sir. God bless your generous heart, and reward you for your goodness to an entire stranger. I will tell you and your mother all about myself in the morning."

"As you please about that. And now, good-night."

It occurred to Fennel, after he had gone to his room, that he had done an imprudent thing in admitting an unknown woman to the house; but he thanked Fortune they had not much to lose, and leaving his door open into the little hall, that he might hear her if she attempted to quit before morning, he threw himself down on his bed to brood in bitterness of spirit over the gay scenes transpiring in the home of his employer.

That soft, wistful glance which Beryl had given him! How sweet would it have been to remember, had it not been followed by that triumphant, contemptuous look of the man who expected to marry her.

And this stranger he had taken in knew Norman Bristow?

What business could she, poor and friendless, have with this handsome and haughty favorite of fortune?

He was to learn what her business was before many hours.

The long after-part of the night wore away, and Fennel had not slumbered, when he heard his mother arise and move about her room in the gray light of the late dawn. He had to arise and knock at her door and explain about the strange guest whom she would find in her tidy sitting-room; and receive a gentle chiding for his imprudence; after which he lay down again and had an hour's sleep, from which he was aroused by the tinkling of the little breakfast-bell.

He made a hasty toilet, and went down to the neat, warm room—kitchen and dining-room in one—where the meal waited to be placed on the table. He bowed courteously to the woman sitting by the window in his mother's rocking-chair.

"How does she strike you?" he asked his

mother, *sotto voce*, as he helped her place the things.

"I think she is all right," was the assuring answer. "Come, madame, breakfast is ready. Sit here, if you please. Well, Fennel, my dear boy, did you enjoy yourself at the great party?"

He smiled bitterly in answer to her fond, anxious look:

"As well as I need expect, mother, dear." Then, seeing how pained and disappointed she looked, added, more cheerfully: "I was quite a beau, mother, dear. You may not credit it, but I danced twice with Miss Ward, herself, and once with the superb Miss Conyngham, who actually requested to have me introduced to her. There's triumph for you!"

"Then why did you come away so early?"

"Oh, pleasure palls on the unaccustomed palate! I was afraid the ladies would spoil me with flattery! I was vexed because Mr. Bristow led in to supper the lady I longed to attend upon. You see, I took it for granted, that Mr. Ward's bookkeeper would have the privilege of waiting upon Mr. Ward's daughter, and being disappointed, I came away! It was fortunate for our guest, here, that I did so. I think in half an hour more, she would have been a thing of the past."

The pale face of the stranger flushed, and she raised a pair of dark eyes, in which were tears and smiles, to his face.

"I suppose I ought to be very grateful," she said, slowly, in that musical voice of hers which had won his attention in the dark, "and I am, for your kindness; yet, it would doubtless have been far better for me had I frozen to death last night. I have nothing to live for—nothing! Had you left me where I was, all would have been over. Now, to-day, the struggle must recommence. I cannot tell you how I dread it."

They both looked at her more closely than they had before permitted themselves the liberty of doing. She was a woman of about thirty. Once she must have been very, very pretty. Her silken dark hair waved along a forehead low and fair. Her delicate features were worn and sharp, there were hollows about her dark eyes; her complexion was of a yellow pallor, like ivory; but, when she had more bloom and spirits, she must have been very attractive. Her dress was better than they had expected to see—an old black silk, much mended and shining with wear, with a mantle of the same, which was but thinly-lined—a summer garment. Yet these articles had been of good quality, and she wore them with a ladylike air. She had laid aside her black straw bonnet when she washed, and had braided her long, handsome hair, and had folded it about her graceful head, becomingly. There was nothing of the adventuress in her air—nothing theatrical, but intensely earnest instead, in the way she had stated the simple fact that she had nothing to live for.

"A great many people find life something of a burden," remarked Mrs. Gray, after a moment's observation. "Yet it was not given us to throw away as soon as we find it hard to bear. So long as we do nothing wrong we ought to have the courage to face our troubles."

"I have never done anything wrong—anything seriously wrong—Mrs. Gray; yet I have been unjustly accused of it, and have suffered more than as if I were the veriest wretch on earth. Oh, you do not know! You cannot conceive what cruel injustice God permits. 'The wicked walk in high places,' and the innocent poor are crushed. Do you know this man, Norman Bristow?" turning suddenly to the young man with keen searching eyes.

"Yes, I have met him. I know of him."

"He is one of the leading men of your city. He is rich, courted, flattered, honored. Ministers of churches are glad of his liberal subscriptions to benevolent purposes; politicians bow down before him; a millionaire father seeks to gain him as a husband for his pure young daughter. Is this not true?"

"You seem to know him very well, madame."

"I ought to know him well; and I do know him through and through, and to the bottom of his worldly, selfish, arrogant nature. Who should be well acquainted with a man, if not his own wife? Look at me! The beggar who is indebted to you for a night's lodging and a breakfast is Norman Bristow's wife!"

"Impossible!"

"No, not impossible, for it is true. You shall have the proofs." She drew from her bosom a folded brown paper, which she unwrapped, disclosing another paper, yellow and worn with time and handling. "Here is our marriage certificate," she said, and handed it to them for their examination.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE WAY TO WIN.

FENNEL's eyes began to sparkle. He read the certificate of a marriage celebrated fourteen years ago, the names of the minister and witnesses signed; the names of Helen Romayn and Norman Bristow standing out before him in characters of fire. He did not think of the poor, deserted creature who sat at his table—only one feeling filled his heart, thrilled his pulse, mounted to his brain in burning waves of joy—the feeling that Beryl Ward could never be the wife of man already married!

"What would Anthony Ward give for a sight of this document?" he cried to his mother, exultingly. Then he turned and clasped the stranger's hand. "It seems providential that you should have come to us!" he said, warmly.

She drew her hand away with a troubled look.

"You are young and enthusiastic," she murmured; "you do not know the world. Nor, have I told you all. There will not be time this morning, if you have to go to business. Let me return here this evening, and give you my history, since you seem interested in this young lady Mr. Bristow has honored with his choice."

"Why leave us at all, to-day? Remain here and rest, if you will," said Mrs. Gray, and their strange guest bowed her thanks.

"One thing only," urged Fennel, whose ardor was suddenly chilled by something embarrassed and anxious in their visitor's manner: "You are truly Norman Bristow's wife?"

"I am. We were legally married, of our own free choice, and our marriage vows are registered in Heaven. Are not such vows eternal? Will not the register last while our souls live? Ay. I call God and his angels to witness that I am that man's pure and spotless wife. 'What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.'" She spoke these words with an indescribable solemnity, then added: "Do not think me mad because I am in such terrible earnest. I heard a rumor to the effect that Mr. Bristow had made up his mind to marry a wealthy young lady; and this it was that called me to Chicago when I had not the money to come comfortably. I sold my watch and chain to get the means to purchase my ticket; I had but a dime left when that was secured, but I was determined to come. I paid out my dime for a cup of coffee, in Buffalo, and had tasted no food since leaving New York, until your son, madame, procured me some, last night. Oh, I would die a thousand deaths of hunger and cold, to warn that girl!"

"But, there is time enough. To-night I hope to be stronger—less nervous—and then I shall be too willing to weary you with my story."

When Fennel Gray started out to walk the two miles to his place of business, it seemed to him that he trod on air. His spirits were as light as last night they had been heavy. Why? His own prospects were none the more rosy—he was still the poor accountant of a rich employer who looked upon him as a part of the machinery which ground out his money—he was still far below all hopes of achieving the hand of the girl he was foolish enough to love; yet, so strange, so unreasoning and unreasonable a passion is jealousy, that the mere belief that Norman Bristow could not have Beryl, either, made him happy.

The man who had insulted him, in the ballroom, with a look—ah, he had gained the darkest secret of that haughty gentleman's life, and he could afford to smile at that look of insolent defiance!

He could even afford to remember that sweet look which Beryl had bestowed on him. Had she given him the jewel from her hand, the rose from her bosom, the gift would not have been more tangible. Then he smiled disdainfully as he recalled the red blossom Miss Conyngham had given him and which he had purposely lost. Why had she been so pleasant to him? It must be that he had it in his power to further some plan of hers.

Miss Conyngham never gave something for nothing.

When he entered the great stone building down among the docks, in the office of which eight hours of his life were passed, each working day, there on his desk lay a perfumed note.

"So early?" he said, with a little scorn curling his handsome mouth. "She must have written it before she went to bed." And tearing it open, he read an informal invitation to a small "musical" which Miss Conyngham had concluded to give on the next evening but one, and which concluded with the magic words—"Miss Ward has promised to be present."

"Why does she favor my meeting her? Ah, I see! Have I not heard that the black-eyed

belle was herself an admirer of Mr. Bristow? She wishes to make him jealous! Good heavens! not of such a nobody as I am? Perhaps she thinks I am so unprincipled as to urge my love on Beryl if the opportunity is made for me! Perhaps she thinks I may persuade my darling to run away with her father's poor clerk!" and here his scorn melted before a tender dream of what he might but would not do.

He opened the great ledger, which might as well have been a photograph album, filled with pictures of Beryl Ward, for he saw nothing but her face upon the page—her lovely face, in its setting of fine, flying, golden hair, as he saw it that day, last summer, on the yacht—her pale face, as he saw it when he dragged her up from the drowning water, to the sunset light of that same summer day—her beautiful face, as he saw it last night, on his breast, with flushed cheeks and blue, blue, smiling eyes, as they whirled and glided about the limitless, bannered, flower-sweet ball-room.

These dream-pictures took flight when two gentlemen came into the office—the great man of the firm and his friend, Mr. Bristow. They entered with a very cheerful, wide-awake air, despite the fact that they had been up all night, and only caught a morning nap between six and eight. The employer said "Good-morning" to his clerk, but the other gentleman ignored his existence; both passed on into Mr. Ward's private office, closing the door after them, and sitting down, one on each side of the baize-covered table, with their heads not far apart, where they entered into a conversation which seemed to have for them a deep and eager interest.

Poor Fennel could not refrain from glancing covertly through the glass door now and then. He knew what those two rich men were talking about as well as if he could hear their words. There was a pleased smile on the countenance of the millionaire merchant. His companion wore a self-satisfied look, full of the complaisant happiness of a favored suitor.

Fennel read that smooth, handsome face with the keen eye of jealousy and by the light which the revelation of the morning had thrown upon it. He saw craft in the smile under the black waxed mustache; love of pleasure and power in the gleam of the half-shut eyes.

Mr. Bristow stood high in the community, not as a man of principle but as a man whose good-will it was very desirable to have. Anthony Ward desired that good-will exceedingly. He needed it. Without it, his hopes of controlling his party and being sent to Washington, were small. With it, he was quite sure he could make his way.

No wonder that he looked pleased during the interview, in which the elegant ladies' man, the influential politician, the "power behind the throne," told him how passionately he was in love with his beautiful daughter, and how he hoped his friendship with her father might be cemented by his union with the idol of both their hearts.

Fennel saw them shake hands across the table and knew the compact between them was sealed. His sight grew dim, his own hands trembled so that he made a blot on the neat page, he grew sick, sick at heart; but he fixed his thoughts upon that stranger who had come with such singular tidings, and found comfort in the remembrance of that document he had seen.

It was impossible to fix his mind upon his work. When Norman Bristow finally went away, he asked permission of Mr. Ward to go home for the remainder of the day, pleading illness.

"Of course, of course, Mr. Gray. You can easily make up the lost time. Late hours do not agree with you, I see, ha, ha! Too much champagne, perhaps! Hope you had a pleasant evening. Fine affair, wasn't it?" Mr. Ward was in an excellent humor for patronizing his clerk.

"Oh, a magnificent affair, sir! I shall never forget it. Thanks for your permission to go home, sir."

"The poor fellow was awfully pale," thought the great man, when Fennel had disappeared. "Too much wine, I dare say. Well, well, I will go home, too. Plenty of guests still to see off. I wish to goodness Bristow had spoken a week sooner!—then the engagement could have been announced at supper last night! That would have added the last blaze to the glory of the occasion!—I wonder what Beryl will have to say! She will be proud as a peacock, little minx, no doubt! There isn't a marriageable girl in Chicago who wouldn't give five years of her life to be in my daughter's shoes. By Jove, I thought she'd bring him, last night! She was as pretty a picture to look at as ever I set eyes on!"

Mr. Ward's coachman was waiting for him

outside—he having left orders that he should be sent for to luncheon—and, wrapped in furs to his ears, was walking the restless horses up and down the street to keep them warm, for the wind from off the frozen lake blew keenly down by the docks. If the streets had the feeling of Arctic regions, Mr. Ward's house, when he entered it, was like a garden out of the tropics, all drowsy warmth and lavish perfumes. Some of his distinguished visitors would not leave for a day or two; there was to be an important political secret caucus held in his library that evening, and the talk, at luncheon, was principally about it, so that the ladies felt slighted, and had their revenge in pouting.

"I tell you, ladies, we will have our dinner in a room by ourselves," laughed Beryl, who, young as she was, was obliged to preside over her father's household.

Bristow had dropped in to luncheon, and he now looked quickly up at the lovely girl and said, smilingly:

"Agreed! With Miss Ward's consent the gentlemen shall all dine with me, at my bachelor's hall; and we will have our meeting in my library," and so it was arranged.

The lover had learned, by a sign from the father on entering, that he had not as yet had the opportunity to speak to his daughter on a certain subject.

"Suppose you introduce the matter, Bristow," he said, in an undertone, as they arose from the table. "You will be more eloquent than I."

"I am more than willing, since I have her father's permission."

No steps had as yet been taken to remove the temporary ball-room, Mr. Ward being unwilling that his guests should be annoyed by the noise of such removal. Mr. Bristow proposed that the ladies should get shawls and have a promenade in

"The banquet-hall deserted,"

a suggestion which the younger ones accepted, eagerly, several of the gentlemen volunteering their attendance. Mr. Bristow gave his arm to Beryl, and, for a time, they walked and talked with the others, amid the fading finery of the improvised hall; but soon the suitor contrived to get away from the party and to seat Beryl by his side on a settee placed in a little bower of evergreens, where flags, pillars, flowers and trees hid them from sight.

Is it true that any girl can prevent any man from committing himself to an offer of marriage, and so spare him the mortification of being rejected, if she does not intend to accept him? So it is said; but it is far from being always so. Here was a girl, young and timid, with a man worldly-wise, cool and determined.

Norman Bristow saw that Beryl was uneasy and anxious to escape the *tête-à-tête* he had decided upon. Not even his good opinion of himself could blind him to the fact that she wished to get away from him. Still, this might be maiden timidity. He was bound she should listen to him—bound she should yield to him. He felt certain that his will was the stronger of the two.

"Sweet Beryl," he murmured, as his firm hand closed softly about her little one, and he bent his head to look into her wavering eyes. "Do not be frightened," as she strove to draw her fingers out of his clasp. "Your father knows all; and he has given me the inestimable privilege of claiming this little white hand for my own. He has given you to me, darling, to be mine, forever—my sweet little wife. Need I say how grateful to him I am? How happy he has made me?"

It was a masterly stroke of policy in him to take it for granted that she was his, because her parent had given her to him. Beryl looked up at him in fear and wonder. The magnetic eyes smiled into hers with a look which thrilled her, despite her vague distrust of him. The warm, close clasp of his hand had power in it, too. He meant to surprise and charm her into consent, and he came near having his way! He knew well how to manage women—when to threaten, when to coax, when to command; when to take everything for granted, as he was doing now.

"You did not dream that I was a marrying man, did you, Beryl? Nor could I have believed it of myself until I met you. Now, it is all settled that you are to be my dear little wife; and I cannot tell you how glad I am—what bright prospects open before me!"—he bent so closely over her, his eyes poured such a look into hers, he held her hand with such a clasp of ownership, his voice murmured at her very ear, so that Beryl felt as if under a spell, and began to wonder if she could never open her lips to utter

a word of protest. Now she struggled against this will which was overpowering her, and drew in her breath with a gasp.

"Mr. Bristow, pray, pray, let me speak! Oh, please, let go my hand! My father cannot give me away without my consent. I will not be given away!" and here, recovering somewhat from her fright, and regaining a little of her natural spirit, Beryl stamped her pretty little foot on the waxed floor, and burst into tears. "I will not be given away!" she repeated. "I do not wish to marry—I have never—thought of—marrying!—particularly you, Mr. Bristow."

"It is not necessary you should have thought of it, sweetest. You are very young and girlish; that is one of your greatest charms to me; I did not expect that you would love me just at first—but that will come in good time. I am not disagreeable to you, am I, Beryl?"

It was on the tip of her tongue to say, "Yes, you are!" but she was too polite.

"I will not believe it," he went on, gayly. "And I know you are too good a daughter to take pleasure in disappointing your father without reason. His heart is set on this matter—more than you dream of. But, come! I will not vex you anymore at present. I don't want your answer all in an hour or a day." He carried her hand to his lips and kissed it, rose, and offered her his arm.

"I am quite certain I shall never be willing," Beryl forced herself to say, as they recommenced their promenade, and he only laughed and began to compliment the dress she had worn at the ball.

She knew that she ought to have said something far more decided—she knew that when they reentered the parlors her cheeks were suspiciously flushed, and that her companion wore an air of happy possessoryship that was plain to everybody—she saw that her father smiled at her meaningly—that eloquent glances were telegraphed about the rooms—and she suddenly became very miserable.

"I won't have it! I won't have it!" she said to herself, desperately. "Oh, why did I not tell him so decidedly? I must speak to papa."

She followed her father about from place to place, until, finally, they were alone together in the recess of a large window.

"What is it, Beryl?" he suddenly asked her, with a smile. "Do you wish to be congratulated on your brilliant prospects, little puss? I do it, with all my heart. I have not been so pleased since the day you were born."

"No, no, no, papa!" she cried, in a low voice, growing very much agitated, and turning pale under his sudden black look of astonishment. "I want to tell you, now, at once, that I am certain I can never love Mr. Bristow well enough to marry him. I am afraid I did not make it plain enough to him."

"I hope not, indeed," responded the father, his brow like a thunder-cloud. "I hope you did not insult the best friend I have in the world. Beryl, what nonsense is this? You must have got some infernal nonsense into your head about some other fellow, to refuse a man like Norman Bristow!"

"You are mistaken, papa," murmured the trembling girl.

"Then let me hear no more romantic prattle about not loving the man I have chosen for you. If you offend Mr. Bristow you ruin my prospects, do you hear? I will not have it! He is a splendid match for you in every way—wealth, position, personal qualifications. I do not wish for a better. Is my judgment to go for nothing? You can learn to like him as well as to like any other man. After you are married, you will grow fond enough of him; and I, for one, don't hold by girls falling dead in love before they are married. From this moment consider yourself the fiancée of Norman Bristow. I have given him my promise and I shall hold it sacred. I shall manage by to-morrow to have the announcement of the engagement made public; it will be in the papers, East and West; and the sooner the marriage takes place the better it will suit me."

Beryl had never before seen her father so angry—never before felt the full tyranny of a parent's will. She was too frightened to dare to shed the tears which swelled under her eyelids.

He laid a grasp on her arm which left its traces there for days.

"Come out from behind this curtain—get up your color—make yourself agreeable to my guests and to him!"

These were the orders which Beryl did her best to obey; and before night, she had been compelled to listen, tongue-tied, to the congratulations of every visitor in her father's house.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE WIFE'S TRAGEDY.

FENNEL GRAY surprised his mother by coming home in the middle of the day. He found her sitting with her visitor in the little plain parlor whose handsomest furniture was his shelves of books and two or three fine engravings which his taste had selected.

Both the ladies were sewing away busily at a chintz dress for Mrs. Gray. The stranger had declared that she could not sit idle while her kind hostess was busy; and the latter soon found that her guest knew far more about dressmaking than she did.

"Yes," she said, in answer to Mrs. Gray's question, "I have made my living by it for some time. It is all that I have to depend upon." Yet Norman Bristow was one of the wealthiest of Chicago's citizens.

The young man found the two women thus quietly engaged.

"You are not ill, Fennel?" asked the mother, anxiously.

"No, mother dear. I asked for a half holiday. Indeed, I could not fix my mind upon figures to-day; I should have made some bad mistakes had I kept at work—so, here I am, ready to be entertained," and he looked at the stranger, whose dark eyes were raised to his, and who knew, very well, that he was impatient to hear her story.

"Let us have a cup of tea, first," said Mrs. Gray, putting aside her sewing.

In a few moments they had tea and toast served in the little sitting-room, the tea hot and fragrant, the toast hot and crisp; and so it fell out that, by the time this light repast was done with, and the strange, sad, pretty woman was seated in the great rocking-chair and ready to begin the account she had promised, it was the very hour during which Norman Bristow was walking with Beryl in the ball-room and sitting with her amid the flowers and evergreens, doing his best to win her—that lovely, pure, delicate-minded maiden—to promise to be his wife.

"You may find it hard to believe," began the stranger, with a slight smile and blush, "but, when I was sixteen I was very pretty. I was tall and slim, my cheeks were the color of wild roses, and my eyes, when I looked at them in the glass, almost dazzled me. I don't think I realized it then, or was at all vain of my beauty; but now, thinking back to those days, I know that I must have been very, very pretty. The most that troubled me then was that I was so poor. My mother, my sisters and I lived in a comfortable house in the midst of a great garden, at the end of the village street; but the house and the good things out of the garden were almost the only comfortable things we had.

"My father left us the house when he died with no income to keep it up. He was a physician, who had saved up some money, but lost it by the failure of the bank in which it was deposited. My mother had never been used to providing for herself and knew no more than a baby what to do when she found herself, after the funeral, with no resources except to collect the few bills still owing. These kept us, in a pinched way, for a year or two. Meantime, we children were growing older, our made-over clothes were wearing out, our wants were increasing. My elder sister, Belle, had three or four music scholars; but her income from this source did not keep us in shoes; and so it came about, after much consultation among ourselves, that we concluded to take a few students to board—for our village boasted of a college—that year that I was sixteen. One of the five who came to make their home with us was Norman Bristow. He was one of the gayest, handsomest fellows at college—he had the most money to spend, dressed the finest, and was looked up to by all the rest not only because he was a Senior, but because he had such a free-and-easy way of spending his liberal allowances, and it was known that his father was a leading New York politician.

"Well, he fell in love with me. He did not seem to mind that my dresses were shabby, my shoes cheap and worn—he said that he loved me for what I was, not what I wore, and he would twine wreaths of roses for my old straw hat and help me pick strawberries for tea from the long beds in the delicious old garden; and I was the very happiest girl in the whole wide world; for, of course, I loved him in return with a blind, foolish fondness that absorbed my whole nature. Ah! what a happy summer that was! Before commencement we were engaged, very privately, as he wished; though my mother knew of it and approved, thinking, in her igno-

rance of the world, what a fine thing it would be for me to make such a splendid match.

"I remember that Commencement Day as if it were yesterday! A glorious day, late in June. How my heart throbbed as I dressed myself in my white frock—which I had 'done up' with my own hands the day before—and tied on my straw hat with its pink ribbon, and pinned some half-open roses in my belt, to walk with my sister to the hall and hear Norman read the class poem!

"I knew that his friends from the city would be present—he had been away the previous evening at the hotel with them—and I expected to be introduced to them as his future wife; so it is no wonder my pulse bounded with fright and pleasure.

"Well, he read his poem—which I thought lovely—and was applauded till the roof rung; and I saw him, bright, laughing, handsome, going to his haughty-looking, elegantly-dressed mother and his beautiful, proud sister; but not once did he look toward me; nor did he bring them to me, though I lingered as long as my sister would allow me.

"That night I went to the reception which was given to the graduates by one of the great ladies of the village. If we were poor, our position was good there, for my father had been a leading physician of the place. Norman and his mother and sister were there. It was a long time before he noticed me at all.

"I was blind with tears, angry, miserable, when I made my way out onto the cool, rose-wreathed porch to hide my trouble. Oh, if I had profited by that one lesson, which should have been sufficient! No, I was madly in love—Norman was the one being in the world who could not do wrong—and when he came to me there, hurriedly, and stole his arm about me and told me, in whispers, how that he dare not confess his engagement *just yet*—he was so very young, his parents would be so dreadfully displeased!—but how he loved me a thousand times better than ever, and should come back at the end of a fortnight to spend a whole week with me—how he could hardly exist through those two weeks till he saw me again—I forgave him and was happy as a little fool again.

"That was the whole story of my life for the next five years—always having my feelings wounded—my faith strained—always forgiving him and believing in him!

"He did return to me at the end of the fortnight. He told me that his people were at Newport and how they wondered that he refused to go with them but chose to go off by himself. They had no idea where he was. Doubtless Norman loved me in those days. At least, my beauty had for him an irresistible fascination.

"I have seen their boasted city belles,' he would tell me. 'There are none like my Helen—no, not one!' And then he would urge me to a secret marriage. Before he left me, that summer, I had yielded and become his wife. I idolized him; I could not resist his arguments, his pleadings. My elder sister was in our confidence. She, too, was overcome by his passionate persuasions and consented to accompany us on the little excursion from which we returned—married. A fellow-student, residing in our village, was also of the party.

"We took a buggy-ride one pleasant afternoon to a neighboring town, where Norman had already engaged a clergyman to perform the ceremony. The clerk from whom Norman obtained the license was a friend of his and said nothing about it at his request.

"We had a month of bliss, heavenly, but troubled. Then Norman's family made so much ado about his not joining them, that he went to them. That was the beginning of the end. He wrote to me at first, regularly, and I lived on his letters.

"He paid me a flying visit in the autumn—another at Christmas. He was already changing—had already repented of his imprudent marriage to a poor country girl. I suspected it, and was too wretched to be as agreeable to him as I once was. 'You spoil your bright eyes by crying so much,' he told me, ill-humoredly.

"His intense selfishness—that selfishness which had urged on our marriage, though I could not see it then—asserted itself more and more.

"He got up a pretext for being angry with me, making that an excuse for not coming to see me again. Long months, that were years to me, wore away. Spring, summer came—oh, what a miserable June I spent! No wreaths of roses—no help in picking strawberries now! I shut myself up in my room and wore out the hot days and weary nights as best I could.

"My mother knew of our marriage now,

and was indignant at the neglect I received, which did me no good, however. The whole village knew that I was a deserted wife.

"In the fall my little girl-baby came, and I wrote to Norman to come and look on its sweet face. He came, and was very kind and loving—for a few days! After that he did not come again until my little darling died, when nearly a year old. He was at her funeral, shed a tear or two, and was away again. Still I loved him, would have died for him. I made for him more than all the excuses he made for himself. He was rich, petted, talented—he had sacrificed himself by his hasty marriage.

"In the third year he had ceased even to correspond with me; but he attempted to enter into negotiations with me, through this friend of his, the student who had been present at our marriage, and who was now settled in our village as a lawyer. If I would get a divorce on the ground of desertion, he would promise me a handsome settlement for life. This I refused to do. I was Norman's wife, however he might choose to treat me.

"The go-between came often to see me; threatened, coaxed, but I was firm as a rock. Then he desisted, but still kept up his visits, making excuses that he was bringing me word of my husband. A few months passed along. Then Norman wrote me very kindly, saying that some papers would be sent to me by his family, and asking me, if I still loved or cared for him, to burn these papers, without reading them! How could I fathom the wickedness of this man, the very touch of whose hand on the letter he wrote I still madly loved? How could I comprehend the devilish plot he had laid against me? Ah, I still worshiped him, cruelly as he had treated me, and when a bundle of documents came to me, I obeyed him, and put them in the fire, unopened. It was not for nearly a year that I discovered, quite by accident, that Norman Bristow had obtained a divorce from me in the New York Court!"

"A divorce!" murmured Fennel, turning white.

"Ay. The terrible truth fell on me with a stunning force."

"Then, you are no longer his wife! That man is at liberty to marry whom he pleases!" cried the young clerk, rising to his feet.

"I am his wife," persisted the woman, passionately; "before God, at least, I am his wife! Let me tell you of the foul plot he was so heartless as to use against one who loved him."

Fennel sat down again, working his fingers together, pale and nervous, scarcely listening at first to what was being said.

"Those papers which I burned at his request were the notification of the suit begun against me, and, of course, I remained ignorant that such suit was in progress and made no defense. I can scarcely bring my lips to frame the words necessary to tell you, that in that suit for divorce the cause alleged was the most dreadful which can be brought against a woman. The person with whom I was accused of being unduly intimate was the young lawyer, who had planned to visit me often, on purpose to give some shadow of proof to the infamous accusation. Could Lucifer himself have plotted anything more utterly diabolical? Is a divorce obtained by deceit, fraud and treachery really a divorce? Am I any the less truly Norman Bristow's wife? Can any other pure woman feel herself at liberty to wed that man? Never! never! I am his wife, God and his angels bear me witness!"

"Poor lady, truly you are," said Mrs. Gray, wiping her eyes. "But, in all these years have you taken no steps to defend your own good name?—to have the decree of divorce set aside?"

"Ah, yes, indeed; I took all the steps in my power, immediately after I discovered the fraud. I went to New York and had a default taken; but, madame, I was poor and friendless; he was rich and backed by all the power of his family—a family whose influence kept that judge in the seat where it had placed him—and, could it be expected that I would obtain justice? My terrible wrongs were not righted there, you may know. My case was dismissed—Norman Bristow left his native city and settled in Chicago—he is a leader, a great man—I am a poor sewing-woman."

She paused, overcome by her emotions, and then continued:

"But, I will never give up my true and honorable title of wife. Let any girl beware how she marries him! That divorce shall yet be canceled. The time will come when another judge will be on the bench, who will listen to reason and do what is just. I have not yet given up the fight. Were Norman Bristow even now married again, I should struggle for my

rights all the same. The lady who marries him will be in danger of finding herself in a doubtful position. I shall warn her, when I know who she is; and then if she runs the risk, I can afford to have no pity for her. Oh, for a little money! If I had not been so very poor—he keeps me so, purposely, that I may be harmless—I should have settled this matter before this. Obliged to toil with my needle for the bread I eat, what time or means have I had to battle with this aristocrat?"

"If I had any money you should have every dollar of it!" cried Fennel. "It's a bitter thing to be so poor! I am glad you have come, though. You shall have food and shelter with us. We will be your friends, though we are without influence. The young lady Mr. Bristow is planning to marry is the purest, the sweetest, the loveliest girl in the whole city. I saved her life out on the lake, last summer, and—and—"

"You love her," added the listener, with a faint smile, as he hesitated.

"If I do, I never expect to marry her. She is far, far, far above me! I have no hopes—none! But I will do all in my power to save her from a union such as that would be! A villain like Bristow marry Beryl Ward! I would rather see her dead. I shall contrive that you shall meet her, madame, and tell her your story. It will not be so very difficult to bring that about. She shall hear it from your own lips, and after that we shall see if she cares to give herself to such a dastard. It will not be as if she liked him. She is not at all in love with him. Her father is forcing her into the marriage as a convenience to himself. It is a mere matter of bargain and sale—my beautiful young daughter in exchange for the votes you can influence! Such is the fashion in high life!"

"I will try to save her, Mr. Gray. I will follow them to the very steps of the altar, if need be, to snatch her from arms that have no right to her. I will forbid the ceremony to go on—I will shame the man of God who ventures to make them one!"

"Heaven prevent such a necessity as that! I trust the affair will never go as far as that!"

Yet the woman's dreamy eyes, as she fixed them steadily on vacancy, were looking into a future where such a tragic scene might be quite possible.

## CHAPTER V.

### MISERY LOVES COMPANY

THALIA CONYNGHAM'S little "musical" was quite an affair, considering that it had been gotten up on the spur of the moment. There were a good many people at it—Miss Conyngham was a leader in the society of the gay Western city—and many beautiful toilets, plenty of good music and a charming supper.

Anthony Ward and his daughter were there; so, of course, Mr. Bristow was in attendance. Thalia was magnificent in a pale blue velvet dress and diamonds; her black hair, her creamy complexion, her dark eyes, were very handsome. But there was a heavy weight on her spirits which she more or less successfully concealed under a manner of unusual gayety: she had heard of the new engagement. She kissed her dear friend, Beryl, with great *empressement* on her arrival, longing to bite that pretty nose off, instead. She kept a watch for the silly young fellow who loved Beryl—the poor clerk who was unobtrusively making such a fool of himself. She wanted to be the first to tell him the bad news—to gloat over his efforts to conceal his suffering. Since she was herself disappointed she was quite willing to enjoy his discomfiture.

It was quite late when Mr. Gray arrived. She knew, well enough, that he could not stay away, though he might resolve to, and she had not given him up:

"So, you are here, at last, Mr. Gray? Thank you for honoring my stupid little *musicale* with your presence. That is Signor Farina who is singing now—lovely tenor, isn't he? Of course you have heard the news! Look at Miss Ward, how brilliantly happy she appears! Just as the lucky *fiancée* of Norman Bristow might be expected to look! You know the engagement is announced? I have congratulated her. You must do the same—"

Fennel turned pale, despite of a fierce effort to betray no feeling, as he followed the slight motion of Miss Conyngham's hand, and saw Beryl Ward standing by the piano at Mr. Bristow's side, her fair head a little drooped, her sad eyes bent to the ground.

"Engaged! Are you certain?"

"All the world is aware of it."

"Then, am I to condole with you, Miss

Conyngham?" This young clerk had turned the tables on her as neatly as any man of the world could have done it—her color rose slightly under his cool look, but she laughed as she answered him:

"Yes; we are both of us in need of solace, I dare say. However, we shall find something to divert our minds before long, I hope. Beryl is too good for Mr. Bristow, that's all. I didn't believe she would have him! But the soft little thing may be more worldly than she looks. I don't deny that I am scheming, ambitious, and all that—but, Beryl Ward! I did not dream of it!"

"I don't think even you would marry Mr. Bristow if you knew as much about him as I do," remarked Fennel.

The instant he had spoken he regretted it, and was very glad that Signor Farina finished his song just then, and that some one spoke to the young lady by his side.

"I must hear more about that," whispered Thalia, as she moved away.

Fennel had come here just for one look at Beryl. He had had his look, but "his hunger grew with what it fed on;" he could not tear his eyes from that face, which, only two evenings ago, had smiled under his gaze with a happy, contented look which it did not now wear.

Had those blue eyes lied to him that night when they told his own the old, ever-new, sweet story? Was Beryl no better, no truer, no fonder, than other fashionable girls who were quite willing to offer themselves on the altar of the world? He had not expected that she would ever marry him—but, to accept that other man! Ah! she was too childlike and pure-minded to conceive of what such a man really was. She must not—should not marry Norman Bristow! He must arrange a meeting between her and Helen Bristow. He did not like to do it, but it must be done. Or, perhaps, it would be better to go to Anthony Ward with the story. Surely, Mr. Ward would easily enough find a way to break the engagement, when he learned the true relations of Mr. Bristow to another woman.

He did not remember how steadily he was looking at Miss Ward while these thoughts were rushing through his mind, until, suddenly, as if his fixed gaze had drawn her, she lifted those drooping lashes, their eyes met, and she gave a little start, while the sweet color overflowed her face in rosy waves.

Mr. Bristow, at that instant, chanced to turn toward her whom he chose to consider his *fiancée*, noted the warm blush and traced it to its source. That clerk again! Was Miss Conyngham right in the suspicions with which she had favored him? The aristocratic vein that ran straight down his forehead swelled out, a gleam of something very like hatred shot out from under his lowering brows, a jealous rage choked him. Fennel Gray was as honest and manly-looking as he was handsome. His love for the beautiful girl who blushed and thrilled under his chance look was pure, tender, full of the romance and the witchery of youth. The older worldling envied and hated him for these things—could have throttled him, because Beryl had colored under his glance. Never mind! She was his, no matter if that young fool, in the last year's coat, did make her blush! Her father would see to that! Anthony Ward knew what were the solid qualities which make a husband desirable.

"What has come to us that we have our bookkeepers at our soirees?" he said, insolently, to Beryl. "Is the haughty Miss Conyngham becoming democratic? Has she surrendered her colors to our conceited clerk of the frock-coat? It looks like it. When we give parties, my sweet, we will ask none whose names are not in the blue-book. That fellow is insufferably vain! If he dares to make eyes at you again I will ask him what he means by it."

"Don't do it, unless you are willing to make me very angry, Mr. Bristow. Mr. Gray is not any vainer than other men; but he is braver—he saved my life at the risk of his own."

Her sweet voice trembled slightly as she said this with some spirit.

"Little Spitfire! I had no idea of displeasing you. If that fellow really saved your precious life I am unspeakably grateful to him, even though his conceit leads him to make eyes at you forever afterward."

Beryl shut her rose-leaf lips tight together to keep from saying something too warm in Gray's defense. Somebody began to bang the piano with a force which made talking quite a feat.

"Let's escape into another room," proposed her suitor.

Beryl looked where Fennel had been standing

—he was gone. "Anywhere you please," she answered, languidly.

Mr. Bristow found her a seat in a little room nearly deserted, and took one beside her. Oh, if he would only go away—let her alone! It was becoming dreadful, the persistency with which he persecuted her with his unwelcome attentions! Why would he not see how tired she was? How she disliked his love-making—trembled at his easy assurance of their future marriage! It could not be that her father would persist after he had time to see how unhappy they two were making her! What a miserable mistake it was, to have allowed people to believe in the engagement! So the poor child fluttered in the net that was spread so airily about her that it still appeared almost like freedom.

As for Anthony Ward, he restrained his exultation over the affair so as not to betray his delight too plainly, and went on, at the musical, as everywhere else, talking politics to such men as he could button-hole. He had no more idea of allowing his daughter to object to what was arranged for her than of the sun's not rising.

Thalia did not get any further talk with Mr. Gray who had given her the slip and gone away before he had been there an hour.

"I thought he had more spirit," she said to herself. "He looks like one of those romantic knights who are ready to carry off their lady-loves at all risk. I wanted to suggest an elopement to him. I believe Beryl could be persuaded. I shall not rest, now, till I learn what it is he knows about Mr. Bristow. It would have to be something very bad to keep me from having him if I could get him to ask me! What has the goose run home for? Well, I sha'n't show any spite to Norman Bristow yet. If Beryl drops him, I may pick him up," and, with this in her mind, she was kindness itself to Mr. Bristow, concealing her bitter disappointment under an amiability which made that astute woman-reader doubt if she had cared for him as much as he had flattered himself.

The "musical" went off with sufficient brilliancy, but nobody was quite satisfied with his or her part in it.

The next morning, when Anthony Ward came down to the warehouse in his carriage and marched into his office with his usual bustling impressiveness, he was followed into that sacred inner precinct by a certain bookkeeper, who stood before him, pale as ashes, and trembling from head to foot.

"Good heavens! What's the matter, Gray? You hav'n't—you hav'n't—none of the boys have been guilty of falsifying the accounts?"

For the clerk looked so guilty and agitated the employer could think of nothing but that he had come to confess a defalcation and beg for mercy.

"It isn't that—nothing of the kind," said poor Fennel, steadying himself by placing one shaking hand on the table. "It's quite another affair—it is, indeed! I am aware that I intrude—that I take a great liberty, in fact, in—coming to you, sir."

"Then, why do you do it? I am very busy this morning."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Ward, but this—is a matter—in which you are more interested than I am. It is on your account—and—and Miss Ward's account—that I make so bold as to speak. Of course, we have all heard of your daughter's engagement to a gentleman who stands very high in this community."

Here he paused again, and the great man began to imagine that all this embarrassed prelude might be to introduce the idea of a silver service which the clerks proposed to order for the bride; he smiled with suavity, waved his hand gently and said:

"Very high, indeed. You say rightly there, Mr. Gray."

"And I cannot but feel it my duty to let you know at once a fact which has come to my knowledge very recently," and now the clerk fixed his grave, troubled eyes full on his employer's. "Norman Bristow is not free to marry your daughter. He is a married man, and his wife is living. She, herself, has shown me the marriage-certificate and told me the whole story."

The rich purple hue slowly receded from Anthony Ward's fat cheeks; he gasped for breath; he stared at the brave young man who had dared to bring him this ill news.

"Do you tell me that Norman Bristow has a wife living?"

"I do tell you so. Hearing of his intention of wedding a young lady here, she has come on from New York to prevent this great wrong to another woman. I found her on the steps of your house the night of your ball, and took her home with me."

"Was she coming in? Was she going to make a scene? That would have been mighty disagreeable! I am glad you prevented it!"

"She was too nearly starved and frozen to have made much of a row, sir."

"Starved and frozen! Norman Bristow's wife! Ha, ha, ha! Some vile impostor! You have been made the victim of some bold creature who has worked on your credulity, young man."

"All I ask is for you to see her and talk with her yourself. I am sure she is no impostor. It will be easy to prove the truth or untruth of her story. Surely, before your daughter is further compromised, you will desire to examine into this thing!"

Compromised! The word stung the haughty merchant. He started to his feet, black with anger.

"By all that is holy, if what you say is true, I will shoot the scoundrel the next time I meet him. I know nothing—care nothing for this wife, but—my daughter shall not be trifled with!"

Then he sunk back in his chair panting.

"It don't seem like Bristow," he muttered. "I cannot believe it. He thinks too much of himself—and he would not dare. Mr. Gray, I am almost certain you have been humbugged."

"Perhaps. You will at least inquire into it?"

"I suppose I shall be obliged to. It will not do to run risks—but, I can't and don't believe it! Some adventuress is in for making money. Where and when can I see this fraud?"

"You can see the lady at my mother's this evening; or she can go to your house, if you say so."

"I prefer to meet her at yours. Less danger of talk. What does she say for herself, anyway?"

Fennel mentioned, very briefly, the dates and some of the main points of Helen Bristow's story, until he came to that part where the fraudulent proceedings for divorce were instituted, when he was suddenly startled into silence by his employer again springing to his feet and bringing down his fist violently on the table.

"So!" he exclaimed, in triumph. "There was a divorce, was there? He has a divorce from her, has he? I thought there would be found to be 'a nigger in the wood-pile,' somewhere! You may drop the subject right here, Mr. Gray. And let me tell you, you have made yourself offensively officious and meddlesome Norman Bristow is a man of honor. The woman was one of the worst sort, no doubt. She entangled a rich boy into marriage before he knew what he was about. If he is free from her, I take the judge's decision that there was a good cause for it. Lord! you came near to getting me into a fatal quarrel with my best friend! Let this be a lesson to you, sir, not to meddle in what does not concern you."

The look of angry contempt he cast on Fennel was hard to bear; but he did bear it, and answered, patiently:

"I warn you, Mr. Ward, that the divorce was obtained by treachery, and that it will be set aside."

"Pooh!" said the great man, snapping his fingers.

"If there is any sacredness or permanence in the institution of marriage—if there is any justice in earth or heaven—any rights which the powerful are bound to respect—any punishment for heartless wickedness—any value to our laws, then that woman is as much the wife of Norman Bristow as she ever was. Would you, could you, sir—you, the father of a pure young creature!—resign to glittering infamy the daughter you pretend to love? Give her delicacy, the first bloom of her young affections, to the keeping of a man like that?—to a man whose only and true wife—the wife of his youth—lives in enforced solitude, desolate, broken-hearted? Will you sell your innocent child for place and power? I do not believe it, Mr. Ward!—I do not believe that I have told you this story in vain."

The young man's eyes flashed and his lips quivered with a noble scorn. In that moment he towered the superior of the man of policy who shrunk from the pure blaze of a pair of honest eyes. In that moment, the shy, silent clerk was eloquent and beautiful. It would have been a favorable moment for Beryl to have studied him.

And there, indeed, she stands, in the office door, a lovely vision in furs and velvets and roses who has stolen lightly in to surprise her father, and has been struck into statue-like pallor and stillness by the words she hears!

"Out of this office, this minute, you impudent upstart!" cries her parent, almost suffocating with rage, to the brave employé. "I want

none of your advice. I think I shall be able to manage my own affairs. Go to the desk and draw what is due to you, take your hat and coat, and leave! You are discharged."

And then the two men turn and see that lovely, pale vision in the door, with the trembling rose-leaf lips, and the pitiful, startled blue eyes, pure as an angel's, but full of trouble.

"How much has she heard?" was Anthony Ward's thought.

"Thank God, if this places her on her guard!" was Fennel's.

He went past her where she stood, pale and startled, flashing on her one dazzling look as he went by, flushed and handsome, and quite as proud as any other living man.

## CHAPTER VI.

### OUT OF HIS WAY.

"WHERE is Beryl? I thought I saw a pair of blue eyes at the window as I ran up the steps."

Mr. Ward and his friend Bristow were at dinner. The soup had come and gone, but the young lady had not made her appearance. The guest was inclined to be in gay spirits but the host was rather quiet and "glum," and frowned when her fiancé asked after his daughter.

"She has retired to her room with a headache, I believe."

Two servants were present so that he could not explain that he and his child had had what Anthony Ward in his own mind denominated "a row." There had been a second scene in the office that morning, after Fennel Gray had taken his hat and left the place—a scene in which a young girl had remonstrated in horror and desperation with her tyrant's resolve to force her into a union with one of whom she had just heard such a wretched story.

"I did not like him before, papa; and, now, you may persecute me, cast me off, kill me, but you cannot force me to marry Mr. Bristow. It is wicked, shameful for you to ask me to."

"You don't know what you are talking about! You are a little fool! To think of throwing over a man whom Thalia, or Teresa, or Lilian would give their eyes to catch! I dare say, if you could have your way you'd marry Mr. Gray!"

"I don't know—he has never asked me."

"Saucebox! Of course you think yourself much wiser than your elders! Of course my opinion of what is right and proper goes for nothing! When I tell you that this woman—whose knight-errant your wonderful Fennel Gray has been silly enough to constitute himself—is a vile adventuress, bent on obtaining black-mail, you turn up your nose at my opinions. You set up your flighty notions against my experience. You take pleasure in showing me that you do not care a pin for my wishes or my judgment."

"Oh, papa, you know it is not that!"

"What is it, then? Beryl, if you are the modest, lovable girl I thought you to be until now you will go home and keep yourself quiet, and be guided by your father. If there is anything wrong about Mr. Bristow trust me to find it out. Don't you suppose I am anxious for your true happiness? What else do I care for?—you are all I have in the world."

"I will go home—and keep quiet, papa," was the answer, in a meeker tone; Beryl did not care to add, just then, what she thought, as she went out of the office with her pretty lips pressed tight together; "but I never—never will let that man make love to me again!"

She had gone home and received a throng of callers all the afternoon, preserving her outward self-possession, going on to make herself pretty and agreeable—as women will while they are wild with grief or pain—smiling at the sly mention of Mr. Bristow to her, again and again; yet, when twilight drew down, and she saw the man himself, pompous, handsome and smooth, coming up the steps, she ran away upstairs, nor could the commands of her father bring her down again.

"I am very sorry for Miss Beryl's headache."

Norman Bristow half-laughed as he said it, thinking to himself: "Some caprice of the spoiled beauty, I dare say. She likes to show me how little she cares for me; but I can afford to bide my time. I never met the woman yet I could not conquer. I like her the better for her spirit. The most of them are too willing."

The dinner hour was rather a dull one, though enlivened by good wine. The master of the house ordered some dessert and coffee sent up to his daughter as he left the table; then said to his friend:

"Come into the library a few minutes, Bristow. I want to speak to you, before visitors come in. Those confounded servants kept my

mouth shut during dinner. Their ears are the best part of them."

As the two went into the room designated Ward closed the door behind them, then turned up the gas to its brightest, and turning toward his companion with a sharp light in his gray eyes, said:

"What is this I am being told about your having a wife, Bristow?"

The sleek, handsome man of the world to whom this question was so unexpectedly put turned yellow and green and afterward crimson; there was dead silence for a minute before he cleared his throat to ask:

"What the dooce have you heard?"

"That you have a wife."

"That is a falsehood."

"But you have had?"

"Yes."

"And the woman is still living?"

"Yes."

"You should have told me this before you asked for my daughter."

"It was an unpleasant confession to make, and—unnecessary."

"It would have been better."

"When did you hear about—about this woman, Mr. Ward?"

"My clerk, Fennel Gray, told me, this morning."

"Ah!" a dangerous sparkle shot out of the half-closed eyes. "A cursed impudent jackanapes that Gray is!"

"I have discharged him for impertinence."

"Good! Where did he pretend to have obtained his information? Been meddling in my private business, has he? I will thrash him, the first time it comes convenient. He would like to be your son-in-law, I dare say. I have noticed that he is troubled with a 'vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself.' Good!"

"The person is stopping at his house. At least he told me I might meet her there. Come, Bristow, let us talk this thing over thoroughly. I have a right to know just how you stand."

"Certainly. I never should have proposed for your daughter had I not been legally free to do so. By the way, Beryl knows nothing, I hope?"

"She came in while we were talking—I don't know how much she overheard," was the evasive reply. "We can manage her."

Now, Beryl's little pink ear was at the key-hole when her father made this assertion, and she drew her breath in hard as she repeated to herself—"Oh, you can manage me, can you, you two men?"

It was a bad thing to play eavesdropper, but the girl felt that all the powers were against her and that she was at liberty to protect herself by any means not wholly wrong. These men were plotting against her happiness—she had a moral right to possess herself of their weapons if she could. However, she was on guard but a few moments after that; the street door-bell rung, and she took a precipitous flight up-stairs while Thomas was coming from his supper to open it. There was company to spend the evening, and she was called down. Pretty soon her father joined them in the drawing-room, but Mr. Bristow did not put in an appearance; her quick ear detected his voice asking Thomas for his overcoat, soon after which the outer door opened and closed.

"He had not the face to come in here tonight," she thought; but it was not shame which kept the man away—it was something important to be done: he had asked for Gray's address before parting with Mr. Ward, and on leaving had taken a horse-car in the direction of that unfashionable suburb called Silvan Cottage Row.

When Fennel left Mr. Ward's employ, that morning, he did not go directly home, disliking to distress his mother with the news that he was out of a place, or to allow Helen Bristow to know that she was the means of it. He went down to the ice and skated for hours, trying by vigorous exercise to overcome his miserable, discontented mood.

Not for a moment could he be sorry that he had spoken as he had; yet he knew that in so doing he had angered a man he would have given much to please, had lost his situation, and placed a still more disheartening distance between himself and the girl he loved.

Going home to tea, he did not allude to his troubles, making himself quite gay and entertaining, so that his mother looked at him sharply to see if he were not "making believe." After supper he proposed to the two ladies to take them to a concert of the Philharmonics which came off that night. Mrs. Gray was delighted; but Helen Bristow declined, with many thanks and much appearance of alarm.

"It would not do for me to run the risk of meeting him. I have no suitable dress. I would not put you to the expense, etc."

However, she insisted on their not remaining at home on her account; there were books to read and sewing to be done; and, truly, there seemed no reason why she should not be safe and comfortable in their absence; so they went to the concert.

Mrs. Gray, at least, passed a pleasant evening.

On their return they were surprised not to find Helen Bristow in the little parlor, book in hand, waiting for them.

"She told me she should sit up for us, and have a cup of tea ready," said the mistress of the small household, somewhat disappointed.

There was no hot water to make the tea; the kitchen fire was quite out.

"I don't like the look of things. Suppose you go up to her room, mother, and find out if she is there."

Mrs. Gray went, with a lamp, to the little hall bedroom at the head of the stairs.

"She is not there, and her bonnet and cloak are gone," she soon said, coming down again.

"What do you suppose has made her leave us in this style?"

"I don't know, Fennel."

"I feel very uneasy about her, mother. Do you suppose any one could have come here, knowing she was alone, and done harm to her?"

"It is hardly probable. Who would do such a thing?"

"The man who wants to be rid of her—in whose way she is."

"Hush! You must be careful what you say, Fennel."

"There is no one to hear me but you; and were there, I should say it, all the same. However, I dare say she has only gone to seek an interview with him. She will return presently. It is imprudent for her to go to him alone; and not very kind not to consult us, or at least take us into her confidence."

"Well, I shall retire, Fennel. I am weary enough to be glad to go to bed."

"I will wait up as long as there is any hope of her coming back, mother."

"I hope there is nothing very wrong. Good-night, my boy."

"Good-night, mother, dear."

She went to her room, while Fennel replenished the fire, drew an arm-chair close to it, took up a book—and waited. He could not settle his mind to reading; it was all one whirl of mingled pictures. He had lost his situation—what was he to do? He had lost all hope of keeping near the girl he loved—what was he to do? Oh, what a world this was for poor folks! Why was he so sensitive to Beryl Ward's beauty and graciousness? She was not for him. She was her father's, to dispose of to the highest bidder! It made him desperate to think of it!

What was that the clock struck—three?

Ay, it was three, in the morning; the oil was low in the lamp, the fire was low in the stove; he shivered as he arose to his feet. Helen Bristow had not returned. What could have happened to her?

He crept to bed and fell asleep with the care of her on his mind, awaking late and springing up with that sense of impending evil upon him which comes after taking our troubles into dreamland with us.

The aroma of the breakfast coffee saluted his nostrils; he hurried to dress and go down, more than half-expecting to find the sad lady in her seat at the table; for, in the morning, we are hopeful.

She was not there. His mother expressed the opinion that they had been deceived in her, and that it might be just as well for them that she had taken herself off. As they were alone together, Fennel took the opportunity of telling his mother that he had been discharged, and what for. She shook her head and groaned.

"You are altogether too hot-headed, Fennel! You don't consider your own interests enough! And in the winter, too! I dare say you will not get even a recommendation from Anthony Ward, after making him so angry. And places so hard to find!"

Poor Fennel! He had spoken out in defense of purity and honor, the words God had put in his mouth, and now even his mother blamed him! It was hard to bear, and made him angry for a while.

"People get no thanks," went on Mrs. Gray. "Do you think Miss Beryl will do anything but laugh at you, my poor boy? Look at Helen Bristow—as she calls herself! What gratitude she shows! Gone off, without a word. I shall look through my bureau-drawers, after breakfast, to see if she has taken anything."

"Mother, please don't speak so about her. I wish I could feel easy about her. I know, well, enough, that some harm has come to her. She may have been murdered! Who knows? I shall make it my business, to-day, to try and find out what has happened to her."

So he did, not for that day only, but for several more. Finally, he came home in the middle of one bright afternoon—the days were growing longer and sunnier in the latter part of February—with a pale face and disturbed air.

"Mother, there's no need of my spending any more time looking for Helen Bristow. She has been found—under the ice in the river."

"Fennel! Is that so?"

"I do not think there can be any mistake. I went, myself, to look at the body. I am certain it is that of our poor friend—dark hair and eyes, shabby black silk dress, and a plain gold ring on the wedding finger marked, 'H. B.'"

"Poor lady. This is a shock, Fennel! I'm awfully sorry I said anything against her. She must have been even more wretched than we knew, to have gone off like that and drowned herself."

"If she did drown herself, mother! Ten to one, but she was foully murdered!"

"Murdered! Horrible! don't hint such a thing, Fennel!"

"Yes, but you see, mother, she wanted to live to thwart that scoundrel. She was determined that he should never marry another innocent girl. By killing herself, she would be helping him along more than in any other possible way. She would live, if only to keep him in fear of her—don't you see?"

"Oh, yes; but in a fit of despair, he may have forgotten all that."

"I wish we had not left her alone that evening."

"It was very unfortunate."

"Now, I dare say, the man who ruined her life for her, is gloating over her death. He is free! What is there now to keep him from wooing and winning the millionaire's daughter? Oh, mother, it seems to me as if my brain would go wild—my heart burst!"

"My poor boy! I wish you had never seen Beryl Ward."

"Yes, he is full of triumph. I passed him to-day—passed them—they were out riding together in Mr. Ward's carriage; he was chatting and smiling, the smooth, villainous hypocrite! But, he has one bitter enemy. He has made one of me. Doubtless, he would laugh with contempt to hear me say so; but even an humble enemy is to be feared. Beryl Ward shall know, fully, what he has been and is. She shall know that I have good reason to suspect him of putting his wretched wife out of the way. I shall make poor Helen's cause my own. If I can trace her steps after she left this house I shall do it. I will leave no stone unturned. She has perished in darkness and loneliness, but the deed shall be exposed to the light of heaven! Look here, mother! Note this little paragraph in the afternoon paper: 'The body of a woman which had lain in the water for several days was taken from the river this morning. It has proved to be that of Helen Romeyn, who came to our city from the East, in search of employment. Very little is known about her. It is believed that she committed suicide.' Who put that item in the paper? The only man who knew her maiden name, Romeyn. What was his purpose?—to show it to Beryl Ward, if needful to prove himself at last undoubtedly free from hated bonds. Oh, I tell you, there 'is something rotten in Denmark,' mother. It shall be my business to hunt it down."

## CHAPTER VII.

DESPERATE DISEASES REQUIRE DESPERATE REMEDIES.

"MR. FENNEL GRAY—Will you meet me at Miss Conyngham's, at eight, this evening?"

"BERYL WARD."

Was he dreaming? Did he actually hold that little rose-tinted, heliotrope-scented note in his hand? Was that her dainty handwriting? His blood went thrilling through his pulses in electric shocks. He kissed the magic name over and over, blushing like a girl as he did so silly a thing, though there were none to see him do it.

The letter had been delivered by a little street Arab who went jumping away without waiting for an answer; and, indeed, it required none, nor would he run the risk of compromising its writer by sending one where it might fall into other hands. Of course he would meet her!

Why had she sent for him? He did not dare

to imagine any flattering reason for her having done so. It must be some errand she wished him to do for her. Or, it might be she had been kind enough to get him a situation in place of that she had been the cause of his losing. He tried to tame his bounding pulse—to convince himself that the little message meant nothing very important; and, as he was not as vain as most men, he succeeded in keeping himself only reasonably elated.

It had been about ten days since his discharge from Mr. Ward's employ, who had refused his name as a reference, and consequently prevented him from finding a situation. Indeed, Fennel was quite certain—from the manner of some of those to whom he had applied and who had promised an answer after seeing Anthony Ward—that the merchant had been revengeful enough to insinuate charges against his honesty. He had no means of knowing this, but he suspected it.

He was therefore the more deeply surprised at Miss Ward's note. He received it about four in the afternoon, and the four hours until eight prolonged themselves into ages, despite the diversion of making his toilet and taking his tea. Precisely at the hour he rung the Conyngham door-bell and was admitted by Miss Thalia, herself, who observed that the servants were at supper in the basement.

She conducted him, with a mysterious air, to a small room back of the long parlor, furnished as a boudoir and crowded with knicknackery.

"There!" she exclaimed, in triumph, "here we are! and if any persons call, we shall have warning before they come in upon us. Béryl, here is Mr. Gray! Papa and mamma have gone to the theater, brother Fred has gone to see his girl, aunt is up-stairs engaged with a new novel, and so, let us make the most of our opportunities."

A slim figure arose from a blue-satin sofa, a little cold, trembling hand was extended to Fennel, who eagerly clasped it, and gazed devotedly into a pair of violet eyes swimming in tears—eyes which seemed to him to appeal to him like a child's.

"Miss Ward," he stammered, "what can I do for you? You sent for me—if I can be of the least service in the world to you only let me know how," and quite unconsciously he held the small hand which she forgot to take away.

"I have had such a time with papa! It was last evening," she said, looking up at him pitifully. "I have been crying ever since."

"Such a time with your father?" his anxious looks asked her to tell him more.

"Yes; and as—as you were the cause of it, Mr. Gray, I thought—perhaps—you would be willing to share the consequences."

"You make me very happy," murmured Fennel, not knowing what he was saying.

"Sit down, both of you, and take it easy," interrupted Miss Thalia. "Take the seat beside her on the sofa, Mr. Gray. I am mistress of ceremonies. The poor child has been woefully abused, and she has sent for you to sympathize with her."

Fennel seated himself, timidly, near the object of his adoration.

"What can I do for you, Miss Ward?" She looked full in his face with a strange smile—

"You can marry me."

"Marry you?" he repeated, incredulously.

"I thought you loved me well enough to marry me willingly," she said, gravely, not even blushing, but regarding him anxiously. His heart throbbed, his face burned, a blaze of glory leaped into his eyes.

"I do love you, more than there are words or ways to tell you, Miss Ward." Then he added, sadly, the light dying out of his countenance: "Perhaps, I love you too well to marry you, Miss Ward."

His thoughts had gone back to his poor, plain home, which, humble as it was, he must soon give up, unless he found something to do—to his loss of salary—to his pitiful bank-account of one hundred dollars, just enough to keep his mother from starving until he could get work again. This lovely young creature in the shining silks and jewels was mad to tempt him to take her into such poverty as his! Her breath fanned his cheek, the touch of her dress thrilled him, her eyes were again filling with tears—his heart bounded, reason and common-sense had a tough struggle with rapture and love.

"Your father would never forgive you," he went on, "never! And you are not fitted for the hardships you would have to encounter as the wife of a poor clerk—a poor clerk out of employment—"

"There it is again," she interrupted him, speaking bitterly. "I did not think you were so worldly!—or I should not have come to you!"

"I! worldly? Heaven knows, Béryl, I am only thinking of you. I would live on moldy crusts all the days of my life and be contented, for the sake of your sweet company. But you—would I offer you such fare?"

"I have quarreled with papa—desperately. I had a scene with him, that night after what I heard you say in the store. Last evening we had it all over again, only worse. Never, for one moment, have I accepted Mr. Bristow or consented to consider myself engaged to him, yet our engagement is taken for granted, and I am to be forced to marry him, when I hate him! He knows I don't like him—papa knows I don't like him, yet they laugh at me as if I were a baby who didn't know its own mind, or what was good for it. Well, after that time at the office when he discharged you, I told papa pretty plainly what I thought of Mr. Bristow! I assured him that these were not the days of despots, and that I wouldn't and couldn't be made to marry a man who had a wife already! He was dreadfully angry with me, which made me very miserable; for papa and I have always been so fond of each other, and he has been so good and indulgent! And Mr. Bristow came and came, and was always so pleasant—would take no offense at my rudeness to him—and here, day before yesterday, papa comes to me, not angry at all, but so very mild and considerate, to inform me that there is no longer any objection to Mr. Bristow—the woman who made him so much trouble, and vexed him so, and was so wicked and ugly to the poor gentleman, is dead—and now there is nothing to prevent my setting the wedding-day, and let it be soon! After telling me this very sweetly he goes off without listening to my expostulations. So, yesterday, Mr. Bristow calls to see me in the afternoon, takes everything for granted, and wants to know if I will be ready to go to New York and Paris with him in May. Then I told him, to his face, what I thought of him! I asked him if his wife was buried yet—where the weed, that ought to be on his hat, was? He got very green and asked me if my taste was for bread-and-cheese and dishonest bookkeepers? At that, I flew into a passion, accusing him of trying to ruin an innocent man, out of jealousy—I told him I had no taste for 'whited sepulchers'—that I thought more of the nail on your little finger than I did of him and his money, and his house, and his position. He was in such a rage that he grew quite white and still, and he swore an oath that I should marry him now—not because he any longer fancied me, but because he was determined to have me where he could punish me for my pretty speeches."

"Oh, Mr. Gray, there was something in his manner, then, that frightened me, although I wouldn't show it. He never told papa that he was angry with me; but staid to dinner, and was as social and gay as possible. So I told papa, myself, after Mr. Bristow went away; and he was awfully angry with me. He said he would turn me out of his house if I didn't behave as I ought to his friends. He said we should be married the first day Mr. Bristow was ready, if that were to-morrow. Those two men will make me do it, I know they will!" she added, wringing her hands.

"They shall not!" cried the lover, fiercely.

"I have thought it all over, Mr. Gray. Thalia and I have talked it over; and, as she suggested, if I were married to some one else, I should be safe from them! They could not force me to be his wife then, could they? So, of course, I thought of you!"

"Angel!" exclaimed Fennel, in a daze of bliss.

Béryl blushed at the ardor of his look, and proceeded hastily:

"You understand, Mr. Gray, I ask you to do this to protect me. I don't expect you to—assume the care of me, or anything like that, at least for years, when I am older and you are better able. I mean for us to remain apart, just as we are now, only I will have the certificate of our marriage to show if they try too hard to urge on that other hateful affair. It is asking a great deal, I know, to ask you to bind yourself to me—"

"Nonsense!" put in Thalia's calm voice. "He will be willing, I dare say," and she laughed with good-natured malice. "There are not many young gentlemen who would refuse Miss Béryl Ward! Come, Mr. Gray, let me tell you the rest of our plan. There is a young clergyman, whose church I sometimes attend, who's very fond of me and will refuse me nothing. I

propose to send round for him now, to come here, when I will explain enough of the story to him to make it plain to him that it is his bounden duty, as a Christian and a moralist, to unite you two in the holy bonds of matrimony. You are both of age; but, it will be necessary to have a license—which you cannot now obtain before to-morrow. Therefore, we will appoint an hour—say 2 P. M., when we will meet somewhere—say at your mother's, Mr. Gray, when my friend, the Rev. David Dash, will speedily perform the necessary rites. Béryl can then return home with her 'marriage lines' in her bosom, which can be produced at any critical moment and flaunted in the astonished faces of her persecutors. There! isn't that a simple, pretty and satisfactory plot for you? Shall I pen a hasty note and send it around to Mr. Dash? I will, without further parley"—and she did.

Miss Conyngham had heard the little story of Norman Bristow's early marriage with a pang which would have been much sharper had it not been counteracted by the knowledge that this troublesome discarded wife was opportunely dead and out of the way. She was quite willing to have Béryl disgusted with Mr. Bristow; her own moral sense was not outraged so deeply but that she was more than willing to secure the great catch for herself; and the prospect for herself now looked much more hopeful. In imagination she was already playing the part of the Good Samaritan—pouring the oil of flat-tery into the wounds of vanity, and winning gratitude in return.

After the clergyman was sent for Béryl grew very nervous. She shrunk away from Fennel as if she had suddenly grown afraid of him; and she said to him, in a very low voice, just before Mr. Dash entered upon the scene:

"You understand that you will be quite free afterward?—that I am to go home just as if nothing had occurred?"

"You shall do just as you please about everything, Béryl," he answered her, though his eyes shone with a fire which she could not meet without the downfall of her own. "I only wish to do what is most truly for your welfare. Certainly, I would not marry you now—poor as I am and deserted by your father—were there any other way of effectually protecting you from that man."

Here the clergyman entered and was soon initiated into the secret purpose of the conspirators. Being dead in love with Miss Thalia, and she making herself very sweet and persuasive, he gave his consent to their wishes, promising to meet them at the designated number in Silvan Cottage Row the next day at the hour appointed.

Béryl was very mild and sweet to her honored parent the following morning. Thalia called, asked for her company on a shopping expedition, and Béryl ordered an early lunch, dressed herself in a pretty street suit of brown silk, and the two friends sallied out and entered Miss Conyngham's carriage about five minutes past one. Mr. Ward left his residence at the same time, helped the young ladies into the carriage, closed the door on them, and sauntered leisurely down-town, without a suspicion of the mischief plotted against his family pride.

"Drive fast, Harry!—round to Mr. Dash's first."

They picked up the clergyman, and the horses' heads were turned in the direction of that unfashionable locality in which was situated Fennel Gray's humble domicile.

Thalia kept up a lively chatter with the gentleman while the poor little runaway nestled beside her, silent and pale.

It was a very pale young gentleman, too, who issued from the door of the cottage before which they drew up, to help his visitors from the carriage.

Had Fennel been a fortune-hunter, eager to secure the millionaire's daughter on any terms, he would not have appeared so conscience-stricken, almost reluctant, as he did now.

He led Béryl in, with an air of the greatest respect, and presented her to his mother, who put her arms about the trembling girl, kissed her, and said, gravely:

"I love you, Miss Ward, because of the trust and affection you have for Fennel; but he and I both beg of you to reflect upon the immense importance of the step you desire to take. In a few moments it will be too late to change your mind. Look about on this poor place! Look at me, a plain, old-fashioned woman—"

"Whom I love already," whispered Béryl, smiling through her tears. "I have had no mother since I was a very little girl—"

"There had best be no delay," interrupted

Thalia, who seemed to be master of ceremonies; "stand right where you are, Beryl, and you, Mr. Gray, take your place by her side. I shall not feel easy until the words are spoken that make you man and wife."

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### A LAWYER HIS OWN CLIENT.

"PAPA, why do you work evenings? You will kill yourself! I can't and I won't have it, there now!" and a pretty little white hand, sparkling with rings, went down upon the pile of legal papers on the table before the gentleman who was scanning them.

"This is something quite out of my usual line of business, Claire. At least, it is business for myself which I am doing, and therefore I keep it for my evenings; my clients keep me busy during office hours."

"I'll wager you my largest diamond it's that English estate, again!"

"You are right," answered the gentleman, blushing under his daughter's amused and skeptical observation. "Do you take no interest in it, Claire? Would you not enjoy coming into an inheritance of a handsome landed estate and fifty thousand pounds accumulated in the Bank of England? My poor brother—and he was a keener lawyer than I, Claire!—used to be very sanguine that we should prove our claims to it. And if Robert had not died just when he did, I believe it would have been ours before this. He understood the case—had mastered it—while I had left it all to him, and had, at his death, to begin at the beginning. There is such a raft of papers, and my eyes trouble me so much at night, this winter! A pair of young eyes and a fresh mind ought to be brought to the task. If you were a son, now, instead of such an ornamental piece of furniture as a girl, Claire!"—he looked up at her with fond pride, however, as he spoke.

"You received a letter, a day or two ago, papa, from my cousin, saying that he was out of employment and would be glad if you could find him anything to do."

"Oh, Fennel? Yes, poor Fennel! I would have liked nothing better than to have written to him to come on, and I would salary him for a year, to make it his sole business to investigate this case. The truth is, I am not able to offer him a salary, such as would support him and his mother. If it were only himself!"

"You could afford to do *anything*, papa, which would secure us the estate. What we cannot afford is to allow our claims to lie idle and disproved. If my cousin is as industrious and energetic now as he was when a boy, he will be just the person for the work!"

"But what can we do with his mother?" exclaimed the other, testily. "That has always been the difficulty. Poor Fennel wanted to read law with me, but he had her to support. I would have given him a home in my family; but I could not have them both, especially as your mother and poor Lucy never got along well together. I dare say Fennel feels bitterly because I have done so little for my brother's son; but I have always found it hard scratching for my own family."

The young lady laughed as she looked about the handsome library.

"It don't look like it, papa."

"I know it. I know I've had a lucrative practice the last few years; but it takes every dollar of my earnings to keep up the style you and your mother *must* have. That's a good suggestion of yours, though, puss, about my nephew. I will write to him this very evening. I cannot possibly offer him more than a room and board in my house and thirty dollars a month for his clothes and pocket-money. He must understand that he has an equal interest in the work with myself—that he is, really, working for himself. If we get the estate, half of it belongs to him and his mother as his father's heirs."

"I will tell you what aunt Lucy might do, if she is not too proud—take the housekeeper's place. She would be independent; and poor mamma is too ill nowadays to make trouble with her."

"I will suggest it, at the risk of giving offense; and I will write the letter now."

He scratched off a couple of pages which he signed, "Your affectionate uncle, Arthur Sutherland Gray."

Arthur Sutherland Gray, Esq., was a popular New York lawyer, who had, at the age of fifty, gained a paying practice, which enabled him to have a house on Fifth avenue, a carriage and pair and a butler; yet, like thousands living in similar style, he was constantly obliged to do his best "to make ends meet." When his brother Walter died—who had also always lived quite up to his income and who left nothing—he

had been unable to offer the widow and her son a home. Fennel would have liked to study law, but was obliged to set about earning a salary as soon as he left school; and he and his mother had gone West because they were less ashamed of their poverty where their former prosperity was unknown, and also because it was easier for Fennel to find employment.

In Chicago the two had lived four years honestly, simply, nobly; fretting as little as possible over the past; making no boast of their family; jesting, sometimes, over that estate in England—dreaming, sighing, hoping sometimes, who knows?

When Fennel was so rudely discharged from Anthony Ward's counting-house, he applied in all directions for a situation. Among other letters which he wrote was one to his uncle—not a begging letter, but one simply asking him if his influence could or would obtain him employment in New York.

The family's claim to the Sutherland estate—going a-begging for heirs—had remained quiescent since the death of the elder brother, Fennel's father, until this winter; when Claire, Arthur's eldest daughter—a bright, ambitious girl, full of pluck and spirit, who craved a good deal more pocket-money than her allowance—became deeply interested in the subject, and insisted on her father taking it up.

### CHAPTER IX.

#### HIT OR MISS?—HIT!

ANTHONY WARD, sauntering leisurely downtown after he had placed Miss Conyngham and his daughter in the carriage, dreaming pleasantly of how his next winter would be passed in "the city of magnificent distances," had his fancies rudely disturbed by encountering a city official who was hastening in the direction of his, Mr. Ward's, house.

"Oh, is it you, Mr. Ward?" stammered the humble court scribe.

As a politician the millionaire made it a business to be affable to all officials, however modest their sphere; so he smiled genially upon this one.

"Were you going to my house, Mr. Jones?"

"I was," stammered the Mayor's clerk, "although, really, you may think it no business of mine."

The great man waved his hand in permission for him to go on.

"I'm sure, I hope, Mr. Ward, you'll pardon me, in case you are aware—which I don't believe—"

"Aware of what, Mr. Jones? Pray, do not be afraid of intruding your little business, whatever it is," patronizingly.

"That a young man, by the name of Gray, has just taken out a marriage license in his name and that of a—a young lady—in short, of your daughter, sir!"

The millionaire stared at the clerk in utter amazement; his florid hue grew sickly; his haughty glance changed to a startled one.

"Marriage-license—my daughter!" he stammered.

"I thought, Mr. Ward—after certain rumors of quite a different character which we have all of us lately heard—that it could not be just right, when a man by the name of Gray took out a license to marry Miss Beryl Ward, and that it would be a friendly office to let you know of it, immediately."

"When was that done?" asked the father, as white as a sheet.

"Not more than twenty minutes ago."

"And Thalia Conyngham in the plot—her! I wonder if they are at her house? Thank you, Jones! You have done me an inestimable favor. Make it a still greater one, by not allowing that little transaction to leak out, and you may draw on me for a thousand dollars. Excuse me; I must move quickly, or I shall be too late."

He retraced his steps past his own house, to the next corner, down that street a few blocks, and up another to the Conynghams. His limbs trembled so that he could hardly force them to carry him; it appeared to his eager haste as if he made no progress at all—as if it were an age before he had reached those steps, crawled up them, pulled the bell furiously. The servant who came to the door stared at him, he looked so strangely.

"Is my daughter here—Miss Ward? Tell Miss Thalia I wish to see her at once," and he pushed his way inside.

The man knew Mr. Antony Ward very well, falling back respectfully for him to enter.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I'm sure, but my young lady ain't come in yet. She's out, sir—unless I'm mistook, she said she were going to take lunch with Miss Ward, sir."

Anthony Ward did not half believe the fellow; he hurried into the drawing-room, but all was dimness and silence there.

"Where had those two gone to meet that scoundrel?"

He had no clew—not the slightest—and time was so precious! Take which choice of ways he might in pursuit, he was liable to make a fatal mistake. He never in all his life—not even that day when he expected his notes to go to protest, and was saved from bankruptcy by a loan made at ten minutes before three—was so nearly crazed as he was that long moment he stood in the empty parlor, wondering in what direction he had better proceed next. He stamped his foot; he tore his hair. Then he turned back into the hall.

"Is Mrs. Conyngham at home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go ask her if she has any idea where the young ladies were going—immediately, my man, do you hear? I'm in a hurry. Tell Mrs. Conyngham not to come down—I can't wait to speak with her—but tell her I want my daughter."

"I guess the house is afire!" thought the servant, moving more rapidly than his dignity usually permitted.

Anthony Ward tramped up and down the hall till he came back.

"Her compliments, and missus knows nothing, if you please."

"You're right there! May I ask who called here last evening?"

"The Rev. David Dash was one of 'em, sir," answered the man, scratching his head, and before he could get any further on the list, the gentleman had plunged down the steps and was off.

Fortunately for Mr. Ward, he encountered an empty carriage, hailed the driver, and got in.

"Rev. David Dash—do you know his address?"

"Yes, sir."

"Drive there," screamed the despairing father—"drive like the d—!"

Of course the reverend gentleman was not found at home.

"A couple o' ladies took 'im off in a coach, sir."

"Where to?"

"Can't say, sir."

The inquirer climbed slowly back into the carriage, where he sunk on the seat quite limp and helpless.

"Wait a moment, driver," he gasped.

The Jehu looked down at his face with some anxiety; he apprehended a stroke of paralysis; but Anthony Ward fumbled in his inner coat-pocket for his note-book, and searched for the address he wanted.

"That's it, by the lord Harry! Eleven, Silvan Cottage Row. Driver, 11 Silvan Cottage Row, and the quicker time you make the bigger pay. Don't spare your team! I'll buy you a better, if you kill this."

"It is hit or miss," he groaned to himself, as he was being rattled along at a lively pace. "I'm going it blind; but this is the likeliest place I can think of."

In fifteen or twenty minutes they were trotting along a quiet suburban street; he let down the glass, and stuck his head out the window of the vehicle:

"Hit or miss, and it's hit by Jove! There's the Conyngham carriage in front of No. 11! Driver, you're a trump! Here's a ten-dollar bill! Let me out! Now—if only I'm not too late!"

In the modest little parlor of No. 11, the young couple, pale, frightened and grave, stood side by side, the minister in front of them, the mother and Thalia looking earnestly on. The young pair had just joined hands when Thalia, whose eyes had wandered to the window, gave a loud scream.

"Your father!"

The next instant Anthony Ward burst into the room, his face distorted by passion, his right hand clasping a revolver:

"Have you married her? Is she your wife?"

With a cry the mother threw herself between her son and the furious man:

"Not yet," she answered him. "You interrupt the ceremony."

"It is well I am not too late, or I would have shot him like a dog! Come with me, Beryl! Come home!"

"Not until I have been made Fennel Gray's wife," she answered him, with a look as determined as his own. "As soon as I am married, papa, I will be at leisure to come with you. Mr. Dash, proceed with your duty, sir—we are ready to do ours."

"But—but—surely, a parent's wish—" stammered the divine.

"I am of age," declared the girl, "I have chosen for myself. I hope you are not going to

play the coward, sir. Go on with the service at once."

"Never! I would kill that poltroon the moment he became your husband! What are you doing with my daughter, you sneak and scoundrel? You fortune-hunter! You mean, spiritless scamp, who are only too ready to take advantage of a girl's folly, to get hold of her money! Oh, you are a pretty one to prate about a suitable husband for a pure girl! Oh, you are a pattern of honor! an example of righteousness! A poor, penniless clerk, turned out of your employer's office for impertinence, trying to marry his daughter! Why, sir, you will starve her to death!—for not one cent of my money shall she ever touch if she takes your name. Take her and starve her, if you will. Keep her in this pleasant home of yours, if you think it a fit place for one brought up as she has been! Ay, you must love her rarely! You must be very tender of her! Such unselfish love merits all the sacrifice she can make! A little soft thing, brought up in velvet and down, take it and see it die by inches before your eyes! There's love for you!"

A deep groan came from Fennel's lips in answer to this torrent of reproaches, curses, vilification:

"It is all true," he said, "too true. Beryl, darling, God knows I warned you of it. I have but a hundred dollars to my name—I am out of work—don't you see, my darling, it is as I tried to convince you—a piece of inexcusable selfishness in me? I must not marry you."

"I prefer starvation—death—with you, to a life with that other man whom my father is determined shall have me. Oh, I know what I can do, Fennel, if you refuse to save me—I can do what Norman Bristow's wife did—jump into the river."

He looked into her flashing eyes with anguish in his own, shook his head sadly and turned to the millionaire:

"Mr. Ward, if I resign all claims to her hand—if I give you my word of honor not to seek her acquaintance further—to leave this city—to never write or speak to her—will you pledge me your word in return that you will not ask her, or influence her, to marry Mr. Bristow?"

"I make no terms except with my equals," was the haughty rejoinder. "Come, Beryl, I want to get out of this. Miss Conyngham, I thought better of you than that you would engage in such foolery as this; your acquaintance with my family is at an end," and seizing his daughter by the arm with a gripe of iron he forced her out of the room, still keeping his revolver in his other hand. At the door he turned and added: "As for you, young man, it may give you great satisfaction to know that I shall now feel compelled to set a guard over my child, night and day. I shall hire a trusty woman to keep her company until she is safe in the keeping of the one I have selected for her husband—a time I shall feel justified in making very brief."

Beryl stretched out her hands appealingly to her lover, who only shook his head again, abandoning her to her fate. So great was Fennel's horror at being thought a fortune-hunter, so keen his fear that a marriage with him would bring want and misery on a girl he loved too well for that, that he saw her father drag Beryl away with almost a feeling of relief.

"Well, I must say you are an ardent lover!" cried Miss Thalia, with great anger and contempt. "To let her go, like that! You, too, Mr. Dash, behaved bravely! I wish you both good-morning," and she marched out of the humble parlor and entering her carriage was driven off without even offering to return the young clergyman to the quarters from whence she had abducted him.

Thalia's chances for winning Norman Bristow were as small as before.

She had aided and abetted the romance of a runaway marriage solely and only that the discarded lover might be left to her. Now it looked as if Anthony Ward was more likely to have his way than any one else. She went home in an ill-humor: the Rev. David Dash returned to his lodgings, having lost his luncheon, his fee, his drive, and the good-will of the young lady he most desired to please; the widow and her son were left alone. When all were gone, Fennel threw himself down on the homely chintz lounge, buried his face in the pillows, and fairly sobbed and moaned like a girl. He did not realize how bright, how heavenly had been the hopes he had built on a secret marriage with Beryl, until they were rudely destroyed. He had thought to himself that, even if married, it would be years before it would be right and prudent for him to claim her, and still—in the

overwhelming despair which mastered him, now that she was gone, he saw how much happiness he had felt in the prospect of having secured their love by such a tie.

His mother, secretly glad that the affair had not been consummated, yet felt her heart bleed for her son to see him in such distress.

"Mother, did I do right not to bind her to our poverty?" he asked, after a time, lifting his head from the cushions and turning a sad face toward her.

"Quite right. I was proud of your decision—for it was—it must have been a powerful temptation. You did what you believed to be best for the young lady, not for yourself, and I honor you for it. That father of hers is a vicious man; he can be ugly enough if he wishes. He would have given neither of you any comfort; very likely, would have been cruel to his daughter; I cannot but be glad that the marriage was prevented. It would have been hasty, ill-advised, imprudent."

"Oh, mother, yes—but if he forces her to marry that man she abhors!"

"He can hardly go so far as to absolutely compel her, if she resists as she ought if she hates him. At all events, having done our duty, we must leave the rest to Him who 'doeth all things well.' Come, Fennel, dear, you have eaten nothing since morning, nor much then. It is three o'clock; I have made some coffee; come and have some, with a slice of cold ham; it is very nice, my poor boy."

As she had consoled him with tid-bits when a little chap, so the mother sought to console her son now that his heart was wrung with a mighty grief; she took him by the hands, drew him up from his tear-wet pillow and led him into the warm little kitchen, where she placed him at the table and sat down opposite him.

The strong coffee certainly did cheer poor Fennel temporarily. After he had eaten and drank, he bethought him of a letter he had taken out of the post-office that morning and thrust into his pocket without opening, so intent was he, at the time, on procuring that license, the getting out of which had caused the traitorous clerk to hasten to Anthony Ward with the information.

"Here seems to be an answer from my uncle Arthur, at last," he said, examining the envelope, with its post-mark of New York. "He has taken his time about it; now let us see what he has to say."

A faint flush of excitement crept into Mrs. Gray's pale face as she fixed her eyes expectantly on her son, who cut open the wrapper with the tea-knife, opened the sheet, and read:

"MY DEAR NEPHEW: There are five thousand more clerks in New York to-day than there are places for. I know of nothing you can do here, and living is dearer than in Chicago.

"Still, I will say this: I have lately taken up the old question of the Sutherland estates. I have no doubts of our being the true heirs. The thing is—to prove it. I have now the time (nor the eyesight,) to go into the papers as they ought to be gone into. If you have a mind to take hold, diligently and thoroughly, and get our claims into shape, I offer you my house as a home while you are doing the work, and thirty dollars a month pocket-money.

"I foresee that your mother will have to be provided for; therefore, I will further say, that your poor aunt is in wretched health—mostly confined to her room—and if your mother will put aside pride and take charge of the housekeeping for my wife, she will be welcome, and entitled to two hundred a year, salary. This is not brilliant, but it is a living; and if, meantime, you are put in the way of proving your half-heirship to the Sutherland estate, you will be making money with a vengeance! Let me hear from you right away, and believe me, sincerely,

"Your affectionate uncle,

"A. SUTHERLAND GRAY."

"Well, mother, what do you say to it?"

"I say—go. Your aunt will quarrel with me, but what of that? Your poor dear father was certain that property belonged to us. If you can prove it—well, we will not be quite millionaires, like Anthony Ward, but we shall be rich enough for our wishes, and be 'landed gentry,' as they say in England. Who knows? Who knows? There's many a turn to fortune's wheel." The fading eyes of the poor lady glowed with the light of hope, the color of youth dyed her cheeks. "The *parvenu* millionaire may smile upon you yet!" she added, slyly.

Fennel, young and enthusiastic, was much elated at first; but when he came to think of going so far from Beryl—of leaving her undefended, to bow to the will of her unyielding father—he became very low-spirited. However, before the two left the table it was decided they were to accept the uncle's offer; and three days thereafter, the cottage, No. 11, was vacant—

mother and son were on the train, *en route* for the East.

#### CHAPTER X.

##### A FRIGHTFUL SCANDAL.

GREAT preparations were being hastily made for the "Wedding in High Life," little forerunners of which continued to appear in Western papers, and even to be copied in the "leading journals" of the metropolis. There could not be a *very* elaborate trousseau, or a grand reception, like the birthday ball, on account of the brief time given by the impatient bridegroom, who was *obliged* to be in Paris the first of April; but the fashionable world consoled itself by the hints thrown out, that the trousseau would be completed afterward by Worth, and a grand party would open the season after the bridal pair had returned from their summer wanderings. The bride, however, was to have a white satin wedding dress, of home manufacture, and to be married in church, which was some consolation to her numerous friends.

Since the hour that Anthony Ward had brought his daughter away from 11 Cottage Row, at the revolver's point, she had been a different girl. Either the mortification of her lover's refusal to marry her, or her feeling that it was useless to resist a will like that of her father, or *some other reason not yet apparent*, had changed her course of action effectually. She was meekly obedient to her father—coldly pleasant to her suitor—she refused to even read the impassioned letter written by Fennel before he left and smuggled into her possession by Thalia—she consented even to the severance of her intimacy with that true friend and confidante. Her parent was puzzled and delighted. He intimated to his friend Bristow the policy of striking while the iron was hot. "That gentleman thereupon suavely begged the young lady to name the blissful day, and make it near.

Beryl humbly asked for a few hours to consider; at dinner, that evening, in company with her dear papa and her devoted *fiancé*, she set Thursday, the eighteenth of March, that being the fourth.

"To oblige Mr. Bristow, who had expressed a wish to be in Paris by the first of April, or as soon after as possible."

The lover was in raptures—made some very pretty and gallant speeches—gazed with covetous admiration at the lovely young creature who had promised to gladden the journey for him.

In his secret heart Norman Bristow sneered at his bride as he did at all women. They could all be bought with a price. Miss Beryl had been mighty independent—put on some telling airs of scorn when she learned of his past life—but all that was only to heighten her own value in his eyes! He was too fine a *parti* for her to refuse! See, how quickly she had fluttered to his feet! He did not know about that scene at No. 11; and he readily overlooked the bitter words she had thrown at him.

He intended to punish her well for them, some time—after she was his wife. She was too beautiful, however, not to have her little sarcasms overlooked for the present.

Anthony Ward did not find it necessary to get a duenna for his daughter. The little rebellion had died out; it was followed by utter submission. She was an angel of patience as she stood to be fitted for the wedding-dress. She allowed things to be "tried on" as meekly as a lay figure. He was so grateful to her that he telegraphed to Tiffany for a *parure* of diamonds to hold on the bridal vail.

Time flew like wildfire; the two weeks were gone in a breath; the wedding-day arrived. The ceremony was to take place in church, to be followed by a *petit souper*, a change of dress, and then, "Heigh, the merry bridegroom and the car!"—Mr. Bristow had chartered a special palace car to take the bridal party through to the seaboard.

Beryl was very pale all day; so pale that she might have been thought ill but for the exceeding brightness of her eyes.

"I hope you are quite well, my daughter?" asks the father, anxiously.

"Never better in my life, I assure you, papa."

She looked him full in the eyes; her own shone like jewels; the rosy lips were pressed together rather tightly—all at once it struck the triumphant match-maker that there was something curious in her expression!—was it not too resolute? Why did the delicate, spirited nostrils quiver so?

Could that girl be plotting any mischief? Could she—what could she do? Why, nothing. He drew a long breath of relief. Of course there was nothing she could do at that late hour

to outwit two men. Nevertheless, he watched her all through dinner with a vague anxiety.

After dinner she went to her room to be dressed. He kept inventing trifling messages as an excuse for sending every few minutes to know that she was really in her chamber—really being dressed for the great and important occasion. She really was.

At the end of two hours they called him up to look at her.

Mr. Bristow had just arrived and sent up by him the bridal bouquet—an exquisite thing, made of white half-opened roses fringed with maiden-hair fern.

Presently Beryl floated down from the upper regions, a dazzling vision of youth and loveliness. She gave Mr. Bristow a charming smile and courtesy. For so young a bride-elect she was remarkably self-possessed. No unbecoming warmth flushed the pearly purity of her cheeks, her eyes blazed like two great sapphires. Diamonds glittered in her amber hair, her little ears, on her snowy bosom.

The man of the world felt his heart throb with mad pleasure to think this young beauty was all his own. No phantom out of the dark past came between him and her. Conscience and memory were drowned in popped languor. Roses, long withered, gave out no haunting perfume, in that hour of his triumph.

"Come! the carriages are at the door; we must not keep our friends at the church waiting too long; the clock strikes seven. We should have been there, promptly, at seven. Come, my dear!" and Mr. Anthony Ward, pompous and in the best of humors, took his lovely daughter on his arm, leading her to the carriage over a velvet carpet laid down for the protection of little satin slippers and a wondrous train. There was a crowd to see the young beauty come out, and a cheer went up.

Mr. Bristow followed, smooth, smiling, placid. There had been no time to arrange for bridesmaids, but he had engaged several of his friends as ushers. These had all gone to the church to be in readiness there; he rode alone in his elegant carriage—newly upholstered in dove-colored velvet for the bride to ride home in. No ghost came up out of the white mist rising drearily over the river—came and took its seat by his side, with dripping, dark locks and black eyes wildly open and a stare—came, and rode to the holy edifice with the man who had broken his early vows. Or, if such came, he was too lost in his happy dreams to recognize it, but hummed a love-song to himself as he followed the carriage of his fiancée.

In a few moments they came to the church. There was a larger crowd in the street and on the sidewalk here. The bride heard many a loud exclamation at her beauty as she passed, with downcast eyes, over the carpet into the vestibule.

The odor of many flowers, the sweet, soul-thrilling strains of the organ, met her at the threshold. Her heart was palpitating wildly enough now. She shrunk, she looked about her as if for a way of escape; then, as the solemn music somewhat soothed her agitation, her lips moved in a silent appeal for strength to do what she intended doing well and with dignity.

The next moment she was moving down the aisle on her father's arm, to the sweet measure of the Wedding March, through "serried ranks" of the fortunate aristocracy whose cards had entitled them to seats. Five hundred pairs of scrutinizing eyes were upon her—upon her *parure* of diamonds, her point-lace veil, her lovely face—that face, so pale and stern, with the strange curve to the roseleaf lips, the strange down-drawing of delicate brows.

Then—her father loosened the grip of her little fingers on his arm—he fell away from her, her only support was gone—she stood side by side with Norman Bristow before the white-robed bishop.

## CHAPTER XI.

### "LADY CLAIRE" AND HER KNIGHT.

"It was I who suggested the wise expedient of sending for you to do this work, cousin Fennel."

"Was it, Lady Claire?"

"Yes, indeed! Do you know, I had a curiosity to find out if you had grown up to be what you promised. You used to be an awfully handsome boy!—the pink of propriety, too."

"So, now, you have gratified your curiosity, Mistress Eve?"

"You don't fish for compliments, do you, cousin?—don't say, 'you dare say I am deeply disappointed,' and all that. He has far too much dignity, *le beau cousin!* Oh, I stand in

such awe of him I hardly venture to pass the library door!"

"I observe that you do not pass it very often, Lady Claire—you generally come in—much to the detriment of my work."

"Well, if that is not cool! Perhaps I had better leave my father's house entirely, for fear of interrupting your lordship?"

"If your father is satisfied to have me waste the time for which he is paying, I ought to be, my dear cousin. Still, if you are ambitious to become an heiress and possessor of the Sutherland jewels, at present locked up with the Old Lady of Threadneedle street, I would seriously advise you not to make yourself too fascinating during business hours. Chestnut curls, brown eyes, coral lips mixed up with genealogical trees and old parchments are enough to keep a poor clerk's brain in a tangle. Do you know, I had just safely perched your great-grandfather on the tip of his branch, when you entered with your usual dash, and sent him tumbling! There he is mixed up with all the others, and it will take me two hours to get him back on his branch again."

Claire laughed merrily. She was an exceedingly pretty girl of seventeen, a born coquette, not a bit averse to confusing so proper a young man as her cousin; who had sadly piqued her by his indifference, and whose compliment about the brown eyes and tresses was the more appreciated from being about the first he had ever paid her.

"Let the old gentleman have a rest, Fennel, while you talk to me and amuse me. Were you ever in love? Are you engaged?"

"I have been in love—I am not engaged."

"How frank! how confiding! Wouldn't she have you?"

"Would not who have me?"

"The one you were in love with."

"Oh! I was in love with a new spring hat, but I couldn't afford it."

"Poor fellow! I sympathize with you. That was a real sorrow. Are the girls in Chicago anything like so pretty as the girls of New York?"

"That depends on taste. There are frightfully ugly ones in both places."

"Saucebox! Seriously, though, I know you have had a disappointment, cousin Fennel! I could tell it, as soon as you came! I wonder why she would not have you! What is the color of her eyes?"

"Blue as heaven, Claire."

"There, you told the truth, then! That was earnest enough. And to think that mine are hazel! Is she rich or poor?"

"Too rich for me."

"Ah! then hurry, hurry, cousin, and perch our great-grandfather on his tree again! Who knows but she may smile on you when you have achieved greatness? I'm going away this minute, so that you may work faithfully. Get him on the right branch, and he will drop a great ripe plum into your mouth, and then, you can go to her, throw yourself at her feet, and so forth," dancing out of the library, laughing back at him as she disappeared.

Fennel heaved a tremendous sigh as he took up a yellow parchment and began poring over its faded characters. It would not do—he could not fix his mind upon his work; for the eleventh time since breakfast he took a perfumed letter from his pocket and studied that in place of the Sutherland succession. It was from Miss Conyngham and said, among other things:

"They are really to be married to-morrow. The cards have been out since Monday. They proceed directly to New York, and from there to Paris. I have had no explanation from Beryl. She has obeyed her father and kept away from me; of course, I cannot go there. The wedding is to take place in church. I shall swallow my spite and go to see how they behave themselves. You made a great mistake in not marrying her yourself, when she was willing, in spite of the father. You are too scrupulous by half—see what has come of your squeamishness! That girl has been bullied into becoming the wife of a man she detests—both of you are miserable for life."

"To be married to-morrow! That was written on the eighteenth—this is the twentieth. She has been his bride two days. They entered this city at noon, to-day. They will sail on the steamer, to-morrow. She is here—somewhere near me—and I, oh, anguish! I have no right to feel, to care, to think, to suffer! She appealed to me in her peril, and I dared not risk her salvation. For fear that lovely body might suffer hunger and cold, I have helped starve and kill her beautiful soul! Too late! too late! too late!"

With a great effort he had commanded himself to answer his gay cousin's badinage. It is

so natural to hide our deepest feelings from the careless touch of those about us. He was little fitted for work that day, and locking up his papers in the secretary, he stole out of the house for a long, rapid walk, where, he neither thought nor cared. It was a bright, windy March day, dry and rather chilly. He walked on and on until he found himself in Central Park. It was bleak there, with the wind sweeping between the two rivers, and he quickened his pace to keep warm. It was two or three o'clock of the afternoon. Not many carriages were on the drive. One handsome turn-out, whose horses were on a quick trot, attracted his attention. He looked after it, becoming vaguely conscious of two veiled ladies, richly dressed, with two fine-looking gentlemen. That one with the haughty poise of the head, the waxed mustache, the half-shut eyes, was that—yes, it was Norman Bristow! Of course that was his bride beside him! Poor Fennel! his heart ceased to beat, he stood stock-still to look after the retreating vehicle, his mouth open, his eyes staring out of his head, his color gone. Then his pulses began to bound madly, his brain to whirl, his face to grow crimson. He had seen those two together; and, as he wandered wearily homeward, his whole future life stretched out before him—a blank.

Among the arrivals in the evening papers he found no mention of the distinguished pair from Chicago, which was probably because they stopped with Mr. Bristow's relatives.

The following day he found the names for which he was seeking in the list of passengers sailing for Havre, on the Cunard steamer. He laid aside the paper about as sadly as he would have closed the coffin-lid on the face of a dear friend.

At the dinner-table Claire asked him to take her to the opera.

"Papa will pay for the tickets; but he has no music in his soul, and Arthur is away at school, and it is so jolly to have a cousin whom one can take the liberty of asking! Now, do be good-natured about it, Fennel, and pretend you are glad to go. You ought to be! Miss Kellogg is sweet in Margaret, and—and—"

"To say nothing of the privilege of escorting a pair of bright eyes! Well, I am quite at your service, Lady Claire."

Mr. Gray, senior, looked at the two pleasantly. Strange as it may seem to us, who know how scornfully our hero has been treated thus far, in the eyes of his uncle he was not an altogether ineligible *parti*—provided the Sutherland property was secured! In that case, it would be a most convenient way of keeping it all in the family to have Claire and Fennel make a match. And it was beginning to look as if their title to the estates could be proved!

Claire abandoned two-thirds of her orange pudding to her ravenous little brother Edgar, to run up-stairs and make herself pretty for the Academy; and very charming she looked when she came down, her chestnut hair glimmering under her tiny white lace opera-bonnet, her brown eyes sparkling, and her cheeks rose-red with excitement, her white opera-cloak, her blue silk dress, her gloves, fan, bouquet and lorgnette, all *comme il faut*.

She felt mighty important to see the carriage come round just for her and Fennel; if he was rather dull after they were on their way, she was lively enough for both.

Many eyes in that vicinity viewed them kindly as a handsome young pair when they had taken their seats in the parquet.

Every one has felt the strange, magnetic influence of a pair of eyes fixed steadily upon him when he was unaware otherwise of their observation. While the orchestra was playing the overture, Fennel became conscious of this singular influence. Involuntarily he turned his glance to a box over the stage and was fascinated, for a full minute, by a pair of bright, sinister eyes, that were regarding him with a sneering smile. He turned red and pale—red and pale—as he recognized Norman Bristow. Vexed with himself for betraying his agitation, he finally tore his gaze away from his enemies. Then, slowly and timidly, he stole another look at the ladies in the box with Mr. Bristow. He would rather not have looked, but he could not help it—to have one more glimpse at that lovely, beloved face, though it deepened his misery, was a temptation he could not withstand.

Neither the one nor the other of those two ladies was the bride! Both were dignified matrons of middle age, richly dressed, haughty of mien, resembling Bristow near enough to render probable the supposition that they were his sisters.

Where was the fair young wife who should

have been by her husband's side? Why was Bristow himself here, when it had been published that he had sailed for Havre? Was Beryl too ill to go?—hardly, or Bristow would not be enjoying himself at the opera.

Question after question forced itself on Fennel. Alas, he could answer none of them. Yet his heart beat more quickly; a splendor came into his face which pretty Claire had never before seen there.

Could it be that something had happened to prevent the marriage?

For a few moments Fennel hoped this; then despair closed round him more darkly than before.—He was making a fool of himself—the bride was wearied out with her long journey and had preferred rest to an evening at the Academy!

"What a stupid, stupid escort you are, cousin! I might as well have gone alone, so far as having any one to talk to me is concerned," pouted Claire, pulling her bouquet to pieces, as they stood a moment in the hall before going up to their rooms.

"I beg ten thousand pardons, cousin Claire! I know I am duller than dullness itself; and you looked so pretty, too, I was proud of you! It's a shame!"

"That you were proud of me?"

"That I didn't make myself more amusing. I'm afraid I shall never be a lady's-man."

The next morning, as he was settling down to his day's occupation in the library, a servant came in to say that a lady at the door was asking for him. What lady could be calling on him? Again his heart began to flutter and his face to flush.

"Did she give her name?"

"No, sir."

"Well, show her in here."

Had he vaguely expected to see the one woman in the world who had an interest for him? If so, he must have been cruelly disappointed. This lady was tall—he saw, before she threw aside her thick veil, that it was not Miss Ward. She closed the door in the inquisitive face of the servant, cast aside the gray gauze which hid her features—

"Helen Bristow! Have you come back from the grave?"

"That was another scene in the comedy, Mr. Gray. I am here in the flesh, but I did not come from the grave."

Yes, there the woman he had thought buried in Potter's field stood before him! She was much better dressed than he had ever seen her, and her expression was brighter; but the hollows in her once oval cheeks were deeper; the shadows under her eyes were darker; she had that hectic flush, beautiful as the tint of sunset, and, like that, the herald of approaching night.

"You left us very suddenly, Mrs. Bristow."

"I did; but not of my own free will. I am come to explain my absence."

## CHAPTER XII.

### BEHIND A JAPANESE SCREEN.

In the dusk of that day on which the Grays had departed from No. 11, there came stealing along Silvan Cottage Row a figure which had been seen in that locality a few times but not often, and stopping at that number timidly pulled the bell-handle.

She waited; no one came to the door. Presently a neighbor put out an inquisitive head from a side window of the next house, calling out that nobody lived at Eleven, now—"the folks had gone away for good—sold out their furniture and broken up."

"Can you tell me where they have gone?"

"No, ma'am, not for certain; I think they said New York."

"Thank you,"—there was the fall of disappointment in the voice saying these two words; the woman turned and went away, slowly, like one who knows not whither to bend her steps. The rain was beginning to fall, not violently, but in a thin, chilly drizzle, against which her thin mantle was almost no protection. Savory odors of hot suppers, preparing for tired fathers of families hastening home after their day's labor, mingled with the sleety rain. The lamps were being lighted along the curbstones. The blinds were not yet drawn over cheery windows, through which the poor wanderer had glimpses of comfortable tables spread for the evening meal. She moaned to herself as she struggled on from street to street, seeming at length to form a purpose to go in a particular direction. She went on for nearly an hour, getting into the most fashionable part of the city, and finally pausing in front of the large, handsome house of Anthony Ward. She stood on the pavement before it, looking at it with hun-

grey eyes; went up the steps, paused irresolutely; then rung the bell. A liveried lackey opened the door, letting a blinding stream of light fall over the worn, wet garments, the pinched, white face of the intruder.

"I want to see Miss Ward. I will only keep her a moment."

"My young lady is at dinner, mum; can't be seen."

"I will wait."

"She's partik'larly engaged, I tell you," responded the fat and full-fed menial, who had a natural contempt for all needy-looking intruders.

"I wish to see her about some sewing—some embroidery."

"Come some other time,"—he was actually shutting the door in her face, when a sweet voice cried out, "What is it, Popple?" and a sweet vision of youth and beauty appeared, before whom the servant slunk back; but not far—he had strict orders about who went out or came in, or who held interviews with his young mistress, in those days. He kept his ears wide open while Miss Beryl, peeping out at the forlorn creature on the steps, said, kindly:

"Why! you are getting wet! I'm afraid you'll take cold. Do you want work? If you do, what kind of work is it you seek?"

"I can do all kinds of French embroidery, Miss Ward. I beg your pardon for asking for you; but it is so hard to reach the ladies—with these servants between, who will not help us—and I am in very great need."

"I buy everything ready-made. Still, I might have you do something for me. Have you references?"

Beryl was full of compassion, and had been imposed upon so often that she had learned to ask for some guarantee of character from those she sought to benefit. This applicant appeared so ladylike that she blushed as she asked the question.

"Yes, plenty of references that I am sure will prove satisfactory."

She took a card and a pencil from her shabby pocket-book, and quickly wrote a few words which she then handed to the young lady.

What was Beryl's intense astonishment to read—instead of the list of names she expected—the following:

"I am the discarded wife of Norman Bristow, falsely represented to have drowned herself. It is important you should know what I have to communicate—can you arrange an interview?"

Suppressing the cry which had nearly escaped her lips, Beryl, well aware that Popple's ears and eyes were bribed to watchfulness, said, carelessly:

"I know these people, whose names you give me. Come to me at eight, in the morning, and I will try you on a Japanese screen which I began myself, but have grown tired of. Popple, when this person comes to-morrow, send her up to my room."

"Yes, miss, to be sure; but I'll have to ask the master about it."

"Of course, of course! Papa can bargain with the lady himself if he wishes. Say to him, distinctly, Popple, that I cannot afford to give over a dollar a day and meals. That screen has already cost me a pretty sum! Do you need any money in advance?" to the stranger, taking out her purse.

"I would be glad of a few shillings, miss."

Beryl gave her a dollar, saying gayly, "At eight o'clock, remember!" and adding, "Good evening," went away into the drawing-room, while Popple shut the door with as much of a slam as he dared, saying to himself, "'Tain't likely she'll see her again, after being so imprudent as to advance her wages."

Miss Ward sat down to the piano and began to sing and play, rattle-de-bang. Her father was coming out of the dining-room and she was obliged to do something to cover her excitement from his suspicious eyes. He came in, looked about, and finding no one there but his daughter, retreated to the library.

There was a fierce pitched battle raging between the two. This was the third day since he had brought Beryl home from No. 11, and neither side had conquered or surrendered. The proud girl was placed under an espionage which made her very angry. However, to-night Anthony Ward was in improved spirits, for he knew, what Beryl did not, that Gray and his mother had left Chicago. He knew that their tickets had been purchased for New York, and that they were actually off on the through express. He could, therefore, afford to relax the vigilance which had held Beryl a prisoner. Some of his political cronies came in and he was very jolly with them; at ten o'clock hot

water, lemon, rum, etc., were brought in from the dining-room and punch was brewed.

Beryl had a few callers and was glad to see them; her spirits bubbled like champagne. The first dim outlines of A PLOT were forming in her mind. She could hardly wait until morning to see and hear more of this strange visitor who had given her the card with the singular message. She lay long awake after she went to bed, her brain working busily.

The next morning she was up betimes and had out the screen, which had been covered with muslin and set away in a closet. Her maid was directed to rip off the muslin and to find the various-colored sewing-silks employed in the pattern; the embroiderer was warmly welcomed and set to work on the tail of a bird-of-paradise, while the fair heiress went to her breakfast. After that meal, an excuse was found for sending the maid out; she was dispatched for more silk along with fifty other things to match, or sample, so as to keep her an hour or two; and then Beryl locked her chamber door, and two tongues, ready oiled, began to run. The bird-of-paradise did not get his gorgeous feathers very rapidly, but THE PLOT advanced with startling rapidity in Beryl's mind—was confided to her companion—assented to if not approved of—and began to exist in action.

"I must and I will have my revenge for the way in which I have been treated. I must and I will punish papa for his cruelty. I must and I will teach a certain man that girls are not to be ordered into marriage against their inclination. You, too, poor dear, will have your revenge! Oh, I should think you could hardly wait for it! Do you know, I have always felt what Norman Bristow was? I had no proof of it at first, but I shrunk from him—I said to myself, 'He is cruel—he is selfish—cold-hearted—a tyrant!' And so he is! Oh, I would just as soon crush that man's pride as I would put my heel on a serpent's head! I would like to make Chicago too hot for him!"

"Can you trust yourself? Have you really the courage, Miss Ward?"

"If I found myself failing I would only have to recall a little of what you have told me, dear madame. You are sure that papa has never seen you?"

"He never has, to my knowledge."

"At all events there is small danger of your meeting him. By a little care you might be in the house six months without facing him, taking your meals as you do in the servants' hall—which is an outrage, but can't be helped. Why, madame, since you have told me what you have, I look upon Norman Bristow as no better than a murderer! Oh, what fun, to have you here under papa's own roof and neither of them dream of it! Oh, what confusion, what dismay, what utter rout we shall carry into the ranks of the enemy!"

From that hour dated the beginning of those concessions which Beryl made to her father and suitor, so surprising and delighting them. That evening the wedding-day was set for the end of the fortnight.

All through the hurry, bustle, confusion of the approaching marriage a pale, quiet, sad-eyed woman sat in the shadow of the Japanese screen, patiently working out the elaborate design in brilliant stitches, hiding the flutter of heart and fingers, trembling at the thought of what she had promised to do—unflinching in her determination to do it.

More than once she heard the gay, smooth tones, which once had power to thrill her heart with passionate love, speaking to another in the same low, devoted, intense accents. On one occasion the master of the house actually brought Mr. Bristow into that very room, where she cowered behind the ivory-silk curtain which alone hid her face from eyes that would have stared to see her there! It was for a glimpse at the wedding-dress and vail laid out on the bed; the bride-elect being absent and unaware of this unwarranted intrusion. The five minutes the two men were in the room were five ages to Helen Bristow, and when they had gone she slipped off into a dead faint, remaining some time unconscious, but finally recovering without any one's knowledge or assistance.

During those two weeks a new black silk dress was being made for Helen. There also had been purchased a pair of gray gloves, a plain, becoming bonnet and some other accessories of the toilet, all of which were paid for out of Beryl's spending-money.

"You must dress this rich dark hair of yours as handsomely as possible," Beryl ordered her, "when you wear the new things."

When the all-important evening came Helen's own hands assisted at the bride's exquisite toi-

let; but, before it was complete, she retired to the little bedroom Miss Ward had assigned for her use, dressed herself hastily but carefully, stole down-stairs when none were in the hallways to observe her, and left the house.

And now we are back to that critical moment when Beryl, on her smiling and satisfied parent's arm, is being conducted to the altar—through the brilliantly-lighted church, all aglow and perfumed with flowers and crowded with her dear five hundred friends—to the sound of the soul-thrilling Wedding March. No rosy blush suffused the cheeks of the girl under the fire of all those admiring or envious eyes; no lilies were ever paler; even her lips were blanched; but,

"with steady eyes serenely,

She, with level-fronting eyelids," walked on and took her place beside the man who had passed down the opposite aisle and met her in that sacred spot.

The organ still played on very soft and low, while the clear, firmly-modulated tones of the rector made their way to every part of the thronged edifice, beginning the solemn marriage-ceremony. "If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace." It was the usual form and was spoken with no expectation of calling forth a response.

No sooner, however, were the words out of the mouth of the good rector than a woman in a seat nearest to the parties arose and stepped into the aisle, and said, in a clear voice:

"I can show just cause. I forbid this marriage."

A silent thrill of astonishment ran through that fashionable crowd. There was not a murmur, but every head advanced and every breath came more quickly, while still the organist, unaware of the interruption, played gently, exquisitely on. The rector looked sharply over at the speaker, and saw a tall, handsome woman, a little over thirty, with a face white as snow, and a pair of dark, diamond eyes shining intensely with nervous excitement.

"What is the meaning of this, madam?" he asked, severely.

Was he not performing the marriage rites for two of the very *crème de la crème* of his parishioners, and was it not natural that he should regard with displeasure such a scenic intrusion?

"It means that I am, and have been for fourteen years, the true and lawful wife of Norman Bristow."

Now, indeed, a low murmur was heard, like the swarming of bees, through the sacred edifice; the repose of even the very Vere de Veres of Chicago society could not endure such a shock as this without breaking a little.

At that first brief sentence—"I can show just cause"—the bridegroom had half-whirled about and fixed on the speaker a look baleful enough to have annihilated her. His handsome face took on the expression of a demon's, or rather, of a wild beast's, with eyes that shone like balls of green fire.

Once the most timid of her sex, Helen met this direful look with one full of steady resolve.

"Has this statement which she makes any foundation in truth?" whispered the man of God to the man of influence.

But Helen, by this time, was making her way up to Norman Bristow's very side in order to reach the clergyman in whose hand she placed her marriage certificate, and who was forced to examine it. Meantime, Anthony Ward had involuntarily caught hold of his daughter's arm and drawn her a little away; he was grinding his teeth with rage and mortification—he did not suspect, as yet, that Beryl had anything to do with bringing about this disgraceful scene.

"What explanation have you to make, Mr. Bristow?" the rector asked, this time aloud, for the document seemed genuine.

"This,"—answered Norman Bristow, boldly facing his audience and speaking with a vibrant distinctness—"and I particularly request none of my friends to leave before they have heard me out. I expect you all to yet have the pleasure of seeing completed the purpose for which we came here this evening—this, that I did, indeed, when I was a callow college youth, imagine myself in love with and clandestinely marry this woman, who has appeared here to-night to wreak on me an unbecoming revenge, then the daughter of the person with whom I boarded—a girl really unfitted by position or culture, to mate with me or mine. Still, I endeavored to make the best of a bad bargain—to do all I could for one my family refused to recognize—until—until—to put it in as delicate terms as possible and yet give you to understand the truth—I learned that she had played me false, and I then sought

and obtained a divorce from her—a divorce which, indeed, left her no power to marry again, but set me free to form such a union as would prove more congenial. She has no more claims on me than any woman out in yonder streets. She poisoned my youth, drove me West for health and peace of mind, and now, when I am about to experience my first real happiness in life, she comes here—here, in this church—to endeavor, in her futile rage, to stab me to the heart. Friends, you know me—what I am—what I do from day to day—how I live! Do you know this serpent who lifts up its head to strike its venomous fangs into me? Well, I tell you nothing but what can be proved from the records. Here stands Anthony Ward: he knows all, and he is satisfied. He has given me his beautiful and innocent daughter, knowing that I was perfectly free to contract a marriage with her"—here he paused for a moment and there was a very light clapping of gloved hands in token of applause. "I think I may ask you, Mr. Montgomery," he then added, with a slight smile, turning to the rector, "to go on with your part of the ceremony."

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Montgomery, go on, go on!" seconded the father, attempting to pull his daughter back to her station by the bridegroom's side; but Beryl's silver voice now rung through the breathless silence—the organist had at last discovered that something was amiss and had brought his music to a close.

"No, papa, not now or ever. I will not marry Mr. Bristow."

In vain he scowled and made signals to her and dragged at her arm.

Helen Bristow looked bravely around upon the sea of strange faces, scarcely one of which gave her a kindly glance.

"He has lied to you all," she said. "He is very plausible. I never was untrue to my marriage vows: although he sought to betray me into imprudence I never gave him reason to leave me. He had to get up false evidence—he perjured himself—he gave me no opportunity to defend my good name. It is true that he obtained a divorce—by perjury. I have fought and shall fight, to have it set aside, so beware, Miss Ward, of possibilities! Not that I would ever live again with him whom I once worshipped—believed in—but who has treated me with cruelty, even to leaving me to starve while he rolled in luxury—not that I would live with him, but that any woman will do her best to protect her good name."

"It is money she is after; she is levying blackmail," retorted Bristow. "Come! is this a place for allowing such a creature to rant? Come, Beryl, let us have this over."

He seized her hand; he motioned to the rector to proceed, who began again, irresolutely:

"I require and charge ye both, as ye shall answer at the dreadful day of judgment—"

He was not permitted to proceed further with the solemn words of warning; the bride had released her hand from the bridegroom's clasp, pushed her father aside, and was walking swiftly down the aisle!

With burning cheeks and flashing eyes she hurried down the aisle, through the vestibule, across the pavement—opened the carriage-door with her own little hands, sprung in, and sunk back on the cushions, ready for home.

"There!" said she to herself, tapping her satin shoe, nervously, "there! I've had my revenge on you both! I don't think papa will ever try to make me marry anybody I don't want to, again! And I hope Mr. Bristow is satisfied! There! the people may thank me for giving them a nine-days' scandal! I dare say papa will kill me if he finds out I did it on purpose! I never would have had the courage to go through with such a scene had I not been so angry when poor Helen told me of the kidnapping, and the pretense that she was dead."

"Ha! I rather think matters are settled for the present! Helen must fly, this very night, as we arranged, or that man will do something dreadful, in his anger. And now, Beryl Ward, summon up all your fortitude to enjoy the fruits of your victory!"

but supposing some neighbor had come to make a friendly call on Mrs. Gray, I went to the door to explain that you were both out. I recognized the figure standing there, at a glance, and was about to close the door and lock it against him; but he quickly pushed in, and himself shut and fastened the door. "There's no need of your making a fuss," he said; "I saw the others go out. So, madame, you are in your old business of making me trouble, are you?" He seized my arm and drew me into the parlor, where he could look at me by the light of the lamp. His own face was diabolical. "What are you doing in Chicago, where I have forbidden you to set foot?" he asked me. "I came here to prevent your deceiving an innocent young lady," I answered him. "You may be seemingly at liberty to marry again, since by fraud and perjury you got a divorce from me, but in my eyes, and God's, you are not at liberty, and I shall do what I can to break up your plans." "You are endangering your very life," he said, meaningly. "I would give that, and more, to save another of my sex from my fate." "I have a mind to shoot you where you stand," he retorted, with an oath, playing with the handle of a revolver in his breast. "Who would ever know that I did it? No one. Norman Bristow stands too high to be suspected." "The birds of the air sometimes carry such secrets," I answered him, quite calmly. "I do not think you could injure your own cause or better mine more effectually, than by doing that very thing. Remember, I have not sought you, but you me, and that will look like premeditation, when I am killed." "You are quick-witted," he said, with a savage grin—for the Norman Bristow the world knows, suave, elegant and gay, is very different from the Norman Bristow I know. I kept a chair between him and myself, and tried to be on my guard, yet, like a tiger springing he was upon me, and had a handkerchief bound over my mouth so that I could not utter a sound; then my hands were fastened together with the silk muffler from about his neck. I was forced into a chair, and tied there.

"He now sat down opposite to me and thought for a few moments, evidently planning what should be done with me. Soon, he looked around the little house until he found my bonnet and shawl, which he put on me, drew me up from the chair, took my arm with a grip of iron and forced me to accompany him. I could no more resist than I could resist a whirlwind or an engine. He led me along the most unfrequented streets; we met few persons, and to these I could not appeal, a my mouth was bound. My vail was over my face, and so no one could tell, at a casual glance, that I was a victim to violence; we seemed hurrying along peaceably enough.

"After a long, long walk, when I was ready to sink with fatigue, we came into a handsome street and stopped before nearly the first house after we turned into it. I was helped up the steps by a strong arm under my elbow; Mr. Bristow took from a pocket a latch-key, opened the door very softly, and dragged me into a hall dimly lighted by a turned-down gas-jet; seized me in his arms and carried me up a flight of stairs, and on into a large bedchamber, where he set me down, locked the door, and turned up the light. "This is my house, madame," said he, in a whisper, "where I do as I like. There is a dressing-closet off this room which has no communication with the outside, or with any other room but this. In that closet you will remain, my prisoner, until after I am married to my beautiful darling, Beryl Ward. I shall dismiss all my servants to-morrow, except my old housekeeper who is stone-deaf, on the pretense of shutting up my house. You can vent your spite on the furniture or by starving yourself to death. Please your own taste about such matters. You have put your hand in the tiger's jaw and you must expect to be nipped."

"He dragged a lounge from his own apartment into the closet, threw on it a pillow and blanket, lighted the gas, forced me in, and turned the key on me. I was his prisoner, in sober truth.

"The room was, as he said, only a large closet. It had one window, high up, which looked against a blank wall. On the other side of the room was, doubtless, another closet, for I never, during the time I spent there, heard footsteps or sounds of any kind in the adjoining apartments; the only door, as he had told me, opened into Mr. Bristow's sleeping-room. As he unbound my mouth and hands I made a desperate effort to escape, but he easily thrust me back and, laughing in my face, locked me in. I scorned to make an outcry which I knew would be entirely useless. There was nothing to do

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE WRONGED WIFE'S REVELATION.

HELEN BRISTOW had a hundred things to tell Fennel Gray. Their interview was necessarily a long one, and very provoking to Claire's curiosity, who knew that her cousin had a lady caller, who was staying unconsciously long.

"On that evening of the concert," the wronged wife explained, "you had been gone but a little while when some one knocked at the outer door. Believing that my enemy was unaware of my presence in Chicago, I never thought of him:

but to fling myself down on the couch and brood over the prospects of escape.

"The following morning he brought me my breakfast and a small table on which to place the salver. I dare say it was his own breakfast brought up by one of his servants, and that he afterward obtained a meal at some restaurant. He allowed my room to be ventilated through his own, whose windows were open, removed the dishes, and brought me two or three novels. I might have made a rush to his windows and screamed for help; but I knew I should fail if I made the attempt and that then he would be merciless and cut off the privileges he was according me.

"Well, I suppose he dismissed his household as he had said—he often did, as he informed me, close it and go to the Palmer House for months at a time—for I heard no movements throughout the house; and after that first breakfast, my food was all such as might have been obtained at a bakery, with canned meats, and occasionally eggs and coffee which he had himself prepared over a spirit-lamp.

"He came twice a day and brought my meals; the remainder of the time I passed in hideous solitude, without even the light of day, for the little window, high up in the wall, did not admit so much light but that I had to keep the gas burning. If he had not been human enough to bring me books I believe I should have gone mad. I used to think—'What if the house should take fire and I be roasted alive?' 'What if he should poison my food?' 'What if some accident should happen to him and I were left there to starve by inches?' I was so afraid of this last contingency—for I grew frightfully nervous in that close air and solitude—that I put away a little of my food every day that I might have a store on hand in case of necessity. 'You will begin to beg for my marriage with Miss Ward as earnestly as you once tried to prevent it,' he said to me once, noticing with keen, wicked eyes, my look of suffering. I made no reply. He was careful never to bring me a newspaper, though I had asked for one. I had no idea of the fraud which had been practiced to persuade Miss Ward that I was dead, until she told me of it, later.

"I had begun to dwell on the chances of escape, by making a rope of my blanket and venturing the window, when, as if he read my very thoughts, he took the blanket away, substituting a down quilt, which could not be torn into strips and had no strength.

"Fortunately I still had in my pocket a little article called a 'housewife,' in which were needles, thimbles, thread and a small pair of scissors. I had found out, by experiment, that by placing the table on the lounge and climbing onto the table I could reach the window, open it and look out below. The next house was only about three feet from it and had no windows on that side—between the two buildings was an iron fence, spiked, on which it would be certain death to fall. There was a carpet on the floor—Norman Bristow did not think of that. I thought I should never make any headway with those tiny scissors of mine; but I loosened one breadth of the carpet, and in four days I had cut it into as many strips, leaving it always in apparent good order on the floor; and he did not detect that it had been meddled with. In short, one rainy twilight I made the perilous descent, as romantically as you read of in the old days of ladders and knights. I had resolved upon what course to pursue, and I made my way straight to the house of Anthony Ward. Miss Beryl should know the truth if I was killed the next hour for telling it."

Helen then went on with a minute account of her experiences in company with Beryl Ward—how she had actually lived a fortnight in Anthony Ward's own house—had once had only a silken screen between her and discovery—and how the spirited young lady had plotted to bring confusion and punishment on her high-handed suitor.

"I am telling my story better now," said Helen, with a smile, as Fennel's eyes began to glow and his cheeks to redden. "You are deeply interested, are you not?"

"I am, indeed. My whole heart and happiness hang on your story. Is it possible that Miss Ward, so young, so timid, had the courage to carry out such a purpose?"

"She has plenty of spirit, that girl has, Mr. Gray! Aside from the embarrassment under the eyes of the crowd in church I believe Beryl enjoyed it better than anything she ever did. She felt that the punishment was so richly deserved! She had advised me, beforehand, to leave town immediately after the affair was over and had given me the money to do so. As we did not believe that Mr. Bristow would care

to come on to New York in that special car without his bride, we had arranged that I should take that train and so get out of the city that night. As soon as I left the church I took a carriage for the dépôt, and had been seated in a car some time when I was surprised and alarmed by seeing Mr. Bristow get out of a carriage and come on board the train. That very moment, before I could decide to leave the train, it was in motion; so, by a singular fatality, I came all the way to New York on the same express with him. He knew it, too; for he came through the cars the following day and saw me. I never saw a look of deadlier hatred on a human countenance than came into his when he discovered me. I feel a presentiment that he will yet kill me. I have angered him past forgiveness now. Once I do not think he would have been guilty of any dark crime; but hate and revenge are passions which grow with indulgence. I confess, I am afraid of him."

"Now, Mr. Gray," continued the sad-eyed and sad-hearted wronged wife, "I not only came here to thank you and your mother for past kindness, and to give you Beryl's dearest love, which she sent you by me, but to ask you if your uncle would not be just the person to attend to my case and get the divorce annulled? He is an honorable man, you can interest him in me, and he will not be compelled to work without suitable reward, for dear Beryl has promised to furnish the means to carry on the suit."

Fennel was quite sure that his uncle would be willing to take charge of her law affairs; he called his mother down to see Helen, and much more conversation was had about Miss Ward, and all the topics of common interest. Mrs. Gray's face brightened, too, when she heard that Beryl was not married. Her secret thought was, "We may obtain our English estate before long, and then, who knows?" Doubtless even sweeter hopes were springing up in her son's breast.

Before Helen went away she wrote her address on a card for Fennel. He was to call and let her know when his uncle would appoint a meeting to look into her business.

"Do be careful of yourself, dear Mrs. Bristow," urged the young man, as he was finally showing her out at the door, "as long as that man is in town. I shall call on you within two days—probably to-morrow, at four in the afternoon."

"I shall not go out at night, and very little at all," she answered him, with a sad smile in her beautiful dark eyes; and with those words, and that mournful smile, she went away.

The address she had given him was a respectable, but not fashionable boarding-house on the East side. At the time appointed, four the next day, Fennel ran lightly up its steps, rung the bell, and inquired for "Mrs. Bristow."

"Mrs. Bristow?" stammered the girl. "Why, sir, don't you know—"

"Know what?" impatiently, and in some alarm; had Helen again disappeared?

"Why, sir, that she's dead!"

"Dead?"

"Yes, sir. She died some time in the night, very suddenly."

The visitor leaned against the door, very white and shaken.

The girl looked at him with that mingling of curiosity and excitement natural to the occasion.

"What did she die of?" he asked, presently.

"That's what nobody knows, sir. The currier's set on the body, sir, an' I b'lieve they think it's heart disease."

"Did she have any visitors last evening?"

"Not a soul. She seemed to be a nice, quiet lady, sir."

"Indeed she was—a perfect lady! I must go home and get my mother. We shall be here in an hour to see your mistress. We are friends of Mrs. Bristow."

"Yes, sir. Missus'll be glad enough if some of the friends will 'tend to the funeral, I know, sir."

Fennel went immediately for his mother. Both were shocked and troubled to the last degree. Helen had never complained of heart disease. They had dark suspicions; yet, what could they suspect, when no one had been near Mrs. Bristow—when she had died alone, in bed, at night, in her own locked room?

For so, it seemed, she must have died. The woman who kept the house gave them all the particulars in her possession.

The new lodger had made no answer when they knocked at her door with her breakfast, which she had asked, the previous night, might be sent up to her. They had become uneasy and broken the lock, and there they found her

in bed, quite cold, lying on her pillow as peacefully as if she had died, without stirring, in her sleep. They had sent for a doctor, and then for a coroner. The landlady had taken possession of the lady's purse, which contained money enough to meet the expenses of the burial. She had not much baggage, the dead lady had not, only a waterproof cloak and a few toilet articles in a bag.

Fennel asked to see the room in which she died. It was shown to him, everything being just as it was, except that the bed had been made up, and the body lay on a board on some chairs, with a sheet thrown over it.

Fennel's eyes ran around the apartment with keen, suspicious glances. The house stood on a corner; this was a back room, with two windows opening upon the side street. He stepped to one of them and looked out. The side of the house was covered with a stout Wistaria vine, some of whose woody branches were three or four inches through; one of these large branches came up directly under the window, parted and clambered to either side.

"Were either of these windows open when you entered the room this morning, madam?"

"The one at which you were standing, was, but the outside shutters were closed. Why? you don't think a burglar could climb up there, do you? Besides, there are no marks of violence, as you can see for yourself, if you will take a look at the poor dear lady."

It would be madness for young Gray to utter a suspicion unless he had some corroborative evidence, and he held his peace; but he did not relinquish his ideas.

He wrote a letter to Helen's sister—whose address in that college town he chanced to know—and she came and took home with her all that was left of beautiful Helen, to commit it to the kindly care of the spring violets and roses in the country church-yard. If her death came about in any wrong way, only one living being knew of it, and that one would not be likely to tell of it.

On the day she was laid at rest in her native valley, Fennel Gray read, among the "personals" of a daily paper:

"Mr Norman Bristow, the wealthy and influential banker of Chicago, who was prevented from getting off on the Russia as he expected, sailed to-day on the Ville de Paris for Havre, to spend a couple of months in Paris."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### ORANGE BLOSSOMS.

Six months passed away and the belle of Chicago was more than ever the reigning beauty. That scene in the church had been a nine days' wonder, from all unpleasant personal consequences of which Mr. Bristow had escaped by his trip to Europe, which he had concluded to take without a wife, seeing that he had failed to secure the one he wanted. Beryl had never been blamed by any one for her part on that occasion—not a soul except the woman now dead was aware that she had herself arranged the little drama—not even her father, who may have suspected but could not be sure of it. Very much out of temper, indeed, Mr. Anthony Ward was, for a long time—would not speak to his daughter for weeks. On the street he defended Bristow—told how he, Ward, knew all about the adventuress who appeared so opportunely, and only regretted his daughter's course in giving up the marriage.

"It will be a match yet—when she gets over the surprise a little; the woman is dead, anyhow—died of heart disease in New York—so that even that objection no longer exists. Fact is, Beryl's a bit of a flirt; rather young to settle down; knows her power over my friend Bristow, and likes to try him. Mark my words, she'll be fond enough of him some day!"

In this strain the father had talked with his friends, making far less of the affair than he really felt. People regarded Beryl as a martyr, to have received such a terrible shock and disappointment; almost everybody condemned the poor dead wife; in less than a month Norman Bristow was more popular than ever.

However, he remained abroad three months; and when he returned the girl in all the State of Illinois who was the sweetest to him was Beryl Ward.

And now three more months have passed and Beryl is again in her room dressing for the wedding. The same dress and vail lie on the silken counterpane; the same diamond coronet flashes and sparkles on its velvet cushion on the dressing bureau. She really means to get married this time, and she seems very gay and happy. There has been more time to arrange a grand affair than before. Six pretty, delicate girls

are to act as bridesmaids; the whole second floor is aflutter with gauze and tulle; all the gaslights by all the pier-glasses are blazing their brightest for the benefit of the sylphs who are arranging sashes and bouquets, crimps and ringlets; there is a constant twinkling of white satin slippers and sweeping to and fro of fluffy white trains, and Babel of musical young voices.

Thalia Conyngham is first bridesmaid and is dressing in the same room with the bride. In her breast is a small world of bitter envy and disappointment—she had done her very best to catch the heart of Norman Bristow on the rebound and had been compelled to bear his return to the old allegiance—yet she makes no sign of discontent, chattering on like a magpie, as their toilets proceed.

"Who do you think I saw to-day, Beryl? I had an unexpected call."

"I should not know where on the list of your acquaintances to begin," laughed the bride, turning to look at the "set" of her train.

"Not lower than a G, my dear. It was Fennel Gray. He said that he had only been in town since morning. When I told him of the grand event to come off this evening, I actually thought the fellow would faint dead away, like a girl. He turned white as a ghost, and could not speak for several minutes. I was surprised. I thought he was engaged to that pretty cousin Claire of his: that he had quite gotten over his first love."

The bride felt her own color changing, and turned still further away to study the set of that shimmering mass of satin and point-lace.

"He and his cousin are the most devoted of lovers," she answered, gayly. "You have too much imagination, Thalia! I dare say he showed no emotion whatever at news that does not concern him in the least."

"Oh, but he *did!* I couldn't be deceived; I rung for a glass of wine. He had just told me he expected to remain in Chicago some time; after that he spoke as if he might leave to-morrow."

"Thalia, have you noticed that the fire-bells have been ringing over an hour? There must be an extensive fire somewhere. I wish they would stop! I don't care to go to church to the music of such wedding-bells as those. What time is it, Julia?" to the maid who was assisting them to dress.

"Quite time we was all ready, miss. There's nothing, now, but the veil, and the diamonds and your gloves. I'll just take a look at the other young ladies to see if they're all right."

"Do so—and find out if papa has come in."

Julia returned in about five minutes to say that the bridesmaids "looked beautiful and were getting on their gloves—but Mr. Ward ain't come back, miss, which is strange, for it's a quarter to eight o'clock and the carriages are at the door."

"Has Mr. Bristow come?"

"No, miss, he hasn't arriv', neither. And oh, the sky is awful red. There's a big fire, an' John, he thinks it's down among the warehouses and that's the reason master hasn't got back yet. Let me pin on your vail; and Miss Conyngham she can help me fix the diamonds—which you mustn't forget your earrings, by all means—an' then we'll be ready when they *do* come. There! don't she look just too splendid for a mortal being, Miss Conyngham? And you look beautiful, too, miss!—such a sweet cross-match to the bride, with your black eyes an' hair."

"I think we do, both of us, look rather stunning," said Thalia, with a laugh, giving herself an admiring glance as she swept past the mirror; "and now, Beryl dear, I'll just run for a peep at the rest of the girls."

"Open the shutters of one of the windows, Julia; I want to see if I can tell if the fire is in papa's direction; then you may go down, so as to know the moment he enters and come tell us."

So the bride was left alone a few moments in her room. It was high time they were on their way to church, where the people must have begun to look for them; but she was not thinking of the waiting people.

In the first place, when she saw how the sky was lighted up, she wondered if her father's great warehouses were burning; then her thoughts flew quickly to Fennel Gray and remained with him. She forgot the fire, forgot her father, the danger to his property, forgot to wonder why the bridegroom tarried. The heavens were as rosy as at a June sunsetting. A crimson blush rested on the white-robed, slim, graceful figure in the window; it dyed the bridal dress, the bridal vail, it dyed the fair, pale cheeks as if with the hue of shame. The city bells kept up their rapid clangor, but she

no longer comprehended what it meant. She was lost in a dream. All her powers of thought and feeling were concentrated in wonder as to what brought Fennel to Chicago and why he betrayed emotion on hearing of her approaching marriage. It could not be that he cared, except that perhaps he felt a sense of guilt when he heard her name. Had he *cared* for her as she once thought he did, he would have answered the two letters she wrote him last May. How ungentlemanly, how cruel, he had been, never to answer either of them. Oh, she had borne bitter slight at his hands! How many thousand times, that summer, the blood had flowed to her forehead to think of how *she had made love to him*, and he had always neglected her overtures, until finally, he had treated them with the scorn of utter silence! He had hung back and refused to marry her when she had begged him to do it as the surest means of preventing another from gaining her hand; he had made no effort to detain her when her father claimed her—why! that night of the birthday party when he had danced with her, *she* had asked for the dance! When blind to the real meaning of this, and still believing that it was because he was poor and she was rich, that he did not appeal to her—after that storm in the church had blown over—she wrote to him. Her letter not being answered she said to herself that it had miscarried, and wrote again. Again no response! That ended it. Only a short time after her failure to break his silence, she heard—in some chance fashion, through friends who were acquaintances of the New York Grays—that Fennel was engaged to his cousin Claire, an exceedingly bright and pretty girl, and that the affair was approved of by her family.

Try to imagine the blow this was to Beryl's pride! He had not cared to write to her—perhaps he had even shown her letters to this triumphant cousin, and she had laughed at them! Beryl had always been courted—a petted darling. A smile, a rose, a waltz from her, were priceless favors to many young gentlemen. Fennel Gray, alone, had slighted her preference. Oh, how she had humiliated herself! His pride, as well as her love, suffered a mortal wound. Her self-reproach amounted almost to insanity. It seemed as if she must die. Wounded vanity drove her on to recover her lost position in Fennel's eyes by showing him she was not so much hurt as he might flatter himself. She could have lovers, plenty and to spare! She could have back the man she rejected in Fennel's favor! It was very easy to tell that she could have Norman Bristow, since, no sooner did he return from Europe than he began to renew his suit, saying to her, at once, that now she was dead who had once stood between them, he took it for granted that they were lovers once more. It chanced that he came to her in the hour when her humiliation was deepest; half-mad, ready to do anything reckless to prove to Fennel that she was not broken-hearted at his loss, she permitted the man she detested to resume his position as her fiancé.

Girls have done just such foolish things before, and will do them again—ruin their own happiness out of spite to some one else!

And, having once set her feet in the wrong path Beryl would not turn back. She deadened conscience, she silenced fear. She would be a merely fashionable woman. She would lead a life of extravagant display. Her father and husband should furnish the money—she would spend it. All that dress and jewels could do to enhance her loveliness should be done. Her father expected to be elected Senator at the November elections; he would take a house in Washington; and she and Mr. Bristow would spend the winter there. She would try for the queenship of beauty and fashion with the highest ladies of the Republican court. *He*—the poor clerk who had failed to appreciate her condescension—should hear of her as the loveliest and haughtiest, the most luxurious, the most extravagant, the most heartless, most sought-after lady in that brilliant circle. As if that would ease the aching of heart, the sickness of soul, quench the mad thirst for love's sweet draught, still the wild hunger for love's sweet food! Beryl knew it would not. She knew she was binding herself to life-long wretchedness. She refused to think—to feel. She treated Norman Bristow with a gay indifference, but no longer with aversion. She was talkative, witty, eager to be amused; she wanted a magnificent wedding; she liked costly presents; she spoke fondly of the dissipations of the coming season.

Her father was so delighted, he gave her everything she hinted she would like. As for her lover, he understood, well enough, that she did not care for him. Neither did he care for

her, except to covet her beauty. He had not forgotten that scene in the church. *He fully intended to be revenged.* It was his boast that he was never thwarted in any purpose to which he made up his mind. This young girl had very nearly gotten the better of him—not quite—*his* turn was coming and he was willing to bide his time.

Beryl would have opened those blue eyes of hers in dread and wonder if she could have read his disposition toward her!

Well, the wedding-day had come the second time.

The bride stood at the window, lost in that dream of the past. It was bad for her peace of mind to learn of Fennel Gray's visit to Chicago—or of his agitation at hearing the news.

She might have dreamed on longer, forgetting that she was dressed for her bridal, had not Thalia and the other bridesmaids trooped in. There was awe and fear on their faces.

"It is half-past eight, and they have not yet come. There seems to be a tremendous fire somewhere!" said Thalia.

"I don't think a fire ought to keep a bridegroom from going to church at the time appointed," pouted one of the group.

They pressed about the window—that pretty group, with their fleecy-white draperies, their wreaths of pink roses, their bouquets of the same, their half-vexed, half-anxious faces, over which the ever-brightening glare of the distant conflagration cast that blood-red dye.

"It always makes me nervous," shuddered another.

"I feel anxious about papa," murmured Beryl. "It must be something very important to keep him away."

"And the people in the church sitting there, waiting!"

"Oh, dear! isn't it unfortunate?"

"I wish there was some one here to tell us what to do!"

Some one was there. At that instant, Mr. Ward came hurriedly into the room, followed by the bridegroom. The faces of both were pale; Anthony Ward looked tired out; his coat was torn, his linen wet and soiled; he spoke rapidly:

"I'm very sorry, Beryl dear; but it could not be helped! My three warehouses are in ruins, and I had to stay by for a time. The fire is spreading—it looks as if it might take a quarter of the city—it is frightful—frightful! But we will not be so ungallant as to keep the ladies waiting any longer; we'll be off at once. I shall not stop to make a toilet; the minister is in a pretty frame of mind by this time, I dare say! So the words are said, it won't matter so much how. Heigho, I've had a time of it! Come, all of you! The carriages are at the door. Three of the ushers have been waiting down in the parlors over an hour—the other three are at the church."

"Yes, come, my love," said Norman Bristow, stepping to the side of his bride and looking at her with glowing eyes, "I must not miss you this time! I should have been here on time, but my hotel was threatened, and I had to take my property away; then I was told your father was down at his warehouses and I went after him. The hotel is in flames this minute. I begin to feel as if the fire was getting the better of the city. I never saw anything like it. However, you and I will soon be far away from it. It is nine o'clock already; the express starts at midnight. One hour behind time at our wedding, my sweet! I trust it is not a bad omen!"

"You'll have to let Norman take you down, little girl; I'm too dusty and smoky and grimy to come within touching distance of that white rig. Come, girls! no ceremony now! Run down-stairs, my pretty dears, and scramble into the carriages."

When Patrick opened the outer door to the patient ushers, and the bride with her six attendants fluttered out like a crowd of white butterflies, there was no crowd on the sidewalk to see them off. The people who had gathered there when the carriages came round had grown weary waiting and had gone off to a still more exciting sight. There were a great many little screams, starts and signs of nervousness when the young ladies got in the open air.

A dull pall of smoke shut out the stars; they could see tongues of flame shooting up in the distance; there was a lurid light over everything, and a hot breath came in gusts down from above.

"Half of the business part of the city will be certain to go," remarked the millionaire, as he sprung into a carriage with two of the ushers.

"When this wedding is over I must go down and take another look."

The streets through which the carriages rolled on the way to church were as light as day; the sky, to the east, was black as ink, except when great waves of color washed over it at intervals.

There were more fluttering tokens of girlish apprehension when the fair bevy alighted at the church doors. Every one looked up at the heavens and around them at the weird aspect of familiar things in that ruddy light. There was no crowd on the pavement there, either, to admire the fine toilets.

"Oh, you're here, be you?" said the sexton, as they entered the vestibule. "Mr. Montgomery got tired an' thought you wasn't coming. I was to run into the rectory an' let him know, if you did. Just wait here one minute, if you please."

The rectory adjoined the church; very soon the sexton was back, bidding them enter, as the rector had already gone in by the private entrance at the rear. The ushers, who had been waiting in the sacred edifice, and who had seated the spectators, came out with rather doleful countenances.

"More than two-thirds of your friends have gone away," said they.

"Never mind," answered Anthony Ward, cheerily—considering that half a million of his property lay in ashes, protected by an insurance of not more than fifty per cent. "The main thing is to get this little affair off our hands. Better late than never." Here we are, in good order, and now—to business. Beryl, my dear."

She took his arm. No reference was made by any one to a former occasion very similar to this, though, doubtless, it was in the minds of one and all. The next moment the fair train was sweeping up the aisle to the rhythm of the slow-beating music.

#### CHAPTER XV.

##### A NIGHT'S SUSPENSE.

BESIDES those immediately interested in the ceremony, there were not half a dozen of the stronger sex left in the building; all had gone to fight the great fire, to see to their property, or to look at the destruction of other people's. The body of the auditorium was about half-filled with brilliantly-attired ladies.

With a dull pain in her heart, Beryl paced to the altar's front; she knew that she was about to seal her life's wretchedness, but had no thought of retreat. She had not been herself since the hour she welcomed Norman Bristow home from Europe. The pure, gentle, affectionate girl had tried hard to make herself a cold, selfish woman of fashion. She knew that she could only endure existence by not thinking or feeling; she had been like a person under the influence of some baleful but exhilarating drug. She must not look back—she must not look forward, but do what she had made up her mind to do.

As she took up her station before the altar she raised her heavy lids and swept a half-glance about her at her surroundings. As she did so she met a pair of eyes fixed upon her with such an expression of utter hopelessness, of bitter despair, that she could no more prevent the pang it gave her than she could prevent a knife from piercing her heart if driven by the powerful hand of another.

Such a look! reproach, anguish, unutterable love were in it.

Fennel Gray had come early and taken one of the side seats nearest to the chancel. He must hear with his own ears, see with his own eyes, the completion of his disappointment.

Or, did she mistake his look, and had he come there to witness her weakness—to note if she faltered—to show her his disregard?

Beryl drew up her slender figure to its full height; her eyes flashed fire; she made the responses in a clear, cold voice that could be heard through the house. The pain at her heart did not vibrate in those proud tones.

This time, no shocking interruption occurred to mar the beauty of the solemn ceremony. The woman who had once intruded herself there, lay in her unmarked grave with the leaves of autumn dropping over it. She had no longer the power or the will to object—she must, perforce, hold her peace forever. The man of God was very courteous to the man of power; the bridesmaids were beautiful and faultless, the ushers graceful and gentlemanly; the fee was enormous; the flowers were lovely, the organist had reason to be happy—and Anthony Ward—though terribly anxious about the red-tongued monster who was devouring his beloved city—was triumphant, for his daughter Beryl was, at last, Mrs. Norman Bristow: the service was ended, the congratulations began.

With stately grace the bridal procession passed out, this time with the lovely wife clinging to her husband's arm.

To any who might have observed him, critically, instead of the bride, his face wore a singular expression as he looked down at the beautiful face of his new-won treasure. There was a smile on it—not of fondness, not of pride, not of tender affection—but of sneering, cynical dislike and contempt. What did it mean? Was his revenge for her former treatment of him still to come?

The old sexton stood on the steps outside as they came into the vestibule. His wrinkled face was ghastly in the strong red glare. He waved his arms when he saw them, shouted "haste, haste!" and ran past them to warn the unsuspecting ladies still seated in the pews.

Anthony Ward ran out on the pavement and quickly back again.

"It is time to be out of this," he gasped; "the spire is in flames—the fire is sweeping down the street, the firemen are crowding this way—for God's sake, don't lose a minute!"

Out they all ran, pell-mell. Thalia was screaming and the remainder of the bridesmaids following suit. Beryl remained calm; but the contrast, when she got out of doors, of that hot, stifling, blinding atmosphere to the flower-fraught, cool, silent air of the church, was intense. The roar of the flames, the rattling of the engines, the hoarse bellowing of the firemen, the shrieks of little children snatched out of their soft sleep, made a pandemonium of deafening noises. The spirited horses attached to the carriages of the bridal party were plunging and snorting; some of them had run away or been taken away by their drivers.

"I did not think the fire could touch this part of the city; the wind must have changed," said Bristow, as he lifted his bride into his barouche. "Hurry, Miss Conyngham! Hurry, young ladies!—Patrick cannot hold these animals a moment longer. Good-by, for a little while, my darling," he added, when he had crowded the carriages with frightened girls. "I will come, when I see all the others safely off."

Anthony Ward was on the box with the coachman, who had trouble to control the restive horses.

"Let 'em go, Patrick. There! we are off, thank goodness! Why! the fire must have taken a leap over a good half-mile of space to light down here so suddenly! Yes, to my house. We are safe, at least—it is traveling away from our street, I should say, by the direction of the wind. Don't look so pale, girls! We'll eat our wedding supper in peace. By Jove!—begging your pardon—but I'm nearly famished. Not a mouthful since luncheon, and working like a beaver at those warehouses! A glass of champagne and a bit of chicken salad, with an oyster or two, will have more of a relish than they ever had before. Ha, ha, ha! I flatter myself it isn't every man who could boast of an appetite after seeing two or three hundred thousand dollars go up in smoke! But I mustn't cry at the wedding! I guess I can stand it. There are some men who will lose all they've got in the world to-night. Bristow's a lucky dog!—not much property in shape to be burnt up. His money is most of it in New York banks." Here one of the bridesmaids gave a scream—a burning cinder had dropped out of the sky into the midst of her tulle flounces, setting them instantly ablaze—but a dozen gloved hands smothered the blaze.

It had been a still, soft Indian-summer day, damp and warm; now, a fierce wind seemed blowing everywhere and every way.

The street through which they were now driving, although illuminated by the general glare, was comparatively safe and quiet. The conflagration appeared to be remote; the inhabitants of the street not at all alarmed.

As they turned into the fashionable avenue on which stood Anthony Ward's residence, he gave a cry of dismay.

"Everything is going! The fire is here, in the block adjoining ours!"

"Oh, papa, can that be true?"—Beryl stood up in the barouche, looked, and sunk back half insensible.

Patrick drove steadily on until he reached the house; followed by several other carriages containing the wedding party; but the flames were close at hand, the sparks falling on their light dresses, the awful, irresistible devourer drawing rapidly nearer.

"Girls," said Anthony Ward, turning toward them a pale face, from where he stood on the pavement, "this is no place for you. The wedding feast will be twice cooked—that is plain. Patrick, for God's sake, take these young ladies to a place of safety. I will save what I can

out of the house. It will not be much, for a dray cannot be had for money. Good-by, and take care of yourselves. I will come as soon as I can."

"Come where?" asked the bride, as the horses plunged, reared and backed. "Tell us where to go, papa! Where will you meet us?"

The bridegroom came up at that instant.

"I would say to my house, Mrs. Bristow," he said, with a smile, "but that has already perished in the general ruin."

"Our house, surely, has not gone," cried Thalia; "let us take refuge there. Mother will be wild about me."

"Very well, try Thalia's," answered Mr. Ward.

"Are you not coming, Mr. Bristow?" asked Thalia.

"Not until Ward is ready. I must aid him what I can."

Again the party set out, seeking a place of safety. Only one carriage, however, went to the Conynghams'; the other girls were fretting and weeping, wondering what had happened to their homes, and insisted on being conveyed to them, if they still existed, and so the bridal party broke up.

The bride and her first bridesmaid, with one forlorn usher for attendant, arrived at the Conynghams', where all was quiet and, for the present, safe.

The male members of the family were away at the fire. Patrick put his team in the stable and went off, too. The two girls were quite exhausted with what they had been through; Thalia's mother brought them cake and wine.

They sat and talked about the fire. Half an hour passed away.

"I do wish papa would come!" sighed Beryl.

"Ah! if anything should happen to him!"

"Or to your husband," added Thalia.

The next moment there was a loud knocking at the street door, and ringing of the bell.

"Good! they have come!" cried the bride-maid.

All three ladies ran to the door, eager to welcome them and hear the news. A young man, a stranger to Mrs. Conyngham, stood there; Beryl and Thalia knew him well—it was Fennel Gray. He lifted his hat.

"I beg your pardon, ladies, but it is time you were preparing to leave. The people are getting out of this street as fast as they can. The houses four blocks below are already burning. Please get away, before the crowd is worse. Do not try to save anything but the smallest articles—your jewelry and silver can be put in the carriage—and a few shawls or blankets, by all means."

"Oh, where is papa?" cried Beryl, in anguish of terror about him.

"And where is Patrick? Our coachman is off, too. Not a soul to manage those spirited horses. Had we not better walk?"

"No; in my opinion you will have to go some distance before you are in a place where you can remain for the night. I will bring out the carriage—this is no time for ceremony—and drive them, if you will allow. Let me urge haste. Five minutes are all I care to give you."

Beryl wrung her hands and moaned for her father. Perhaps Fennel noticed that her cry was only for him—not for her husband. He hurried to get out the team; Mrs. Conyngham and her female servants crowded some silver into a basket, Thalia rushed for her jewels; at the end of the five minutes they had bidden adieu to the dear old home.

Fennel, whose calmness helped to keep them calm, sent the maid back for the wraps which had been forgotten.

"If you lodge out on the prairie you will need them," he observed.

"On the prairie!" echoed Thalia. "What put that in your head?"

"Thousands will be driven there to-night," was the answer.

And now the rushing heat and smoke were very near, indeed.

Delicate ladies, sobbing children, were hurrying on. Some had their arms full; some had not even a shawl. Two or three wagons went by, filled with household effects thrown hastily in.

Fennel climbed to the box and drove rapidly on; presently he stopped to take a lady and her infant in, who seemed too feeble to walk.

They seemed now to be almost surrounded by the fiery circle. The women, shrinking and shuddering, wondered if he would succeed in getting them out of the danger which environed them. Great clouds of sparks and cinders went crackling and shining overhead—Mr. Gray had covered the light bridal dresses with woolen

wraps—great clouds of pitch-black smoke, catching the red reflection on their billowy edges; sudden currents of hot air swooped down and enveloped them; long tongues of flame licked the sky and were withdrawn; a dull, heavy roar trembled on the ear. Beryl flung the corner of her cloak over her face to shut out the sight, and kept moaning for her father.

Amid the wild improbabilities of life this was one of the wildest—that she should be separated from her husband on their wedding-night and thrown upon the care of the poor clerk her father had discharged!

More than once Gray had to retrace his way and take another course; there was no calculating where the fire would be; finally, about midnight, he drew rein out on the open prairie, miles from the dwelling they had deserted. Hundreds of women and children were before them; poor creatures without a blanket to spread between them and the damp ground on which they were seated, their faces blank with despair or lighted up with the strange excitement of the scene.

"Here you are," said Fennel, "and here you will have to remain for the present. You are a thousand times better off than the most, since the carriage is comfortable and something of a protection against the drizzling rain which is beginning to fall. I will take the horses out, fasten them somewhere, and return here to mount guard—if you wish, or will feel the better for having some one you know near you—until your friends discover your whereabouts."

Thalia begged him to remain with them; so did her mother; Beryl said nothing.

He took the horses away, soon returning to his self-appointed charge. He did not attempt to make conversation; seemed to wish not to intrude; gave two ladies the box of the carriage—not very comfortable, but safer than the chilly earth—and flung himself down not far from them, where he could watch the melting away of the doomed city. Not once did he address himself to Beryl, nor did she once speak to him.

The long, long hours dragged on. All the ladies were too anxious about their husbands, brothers and fathers, who were either fighting the foe, or victims to his wrath, to be able to sleep.

All that endless night Beryl's wide-open, shining, feverish eyes stared out before her, looking for her father. In that strange crowd, now numbering thousands, with nothing to pilot him, it was not wonderful that he should not discover them.

And so, after the weird night had worn itself away, the wan morning arose over the smoldering ruins, and the desolate, homeless ones, finding the bride, pale, hollow-eyed, still watching eagerly for her father.

She had removed the point-lace veil, the orange-blossoms, the glittering garland of diamonds, and held them in her lap; her costly satin dress was crushed under the heavy cloak which had not been heavy enough to keep her from shivering with cold and nervousness.

All at once she sprung up, the cloak slipped down from her slim figure, and she stood there like a lily, white and tall.

"Papa! papa!" she screamed, stretching out her arms.

A figure emerged from the crowd and hurried toward the carriage—Anthony Ward, tired, haggard, with smirched face and dirty hands and torn clothing.

"I have been searching for you six hours," he called out. Then, when he had come nearer and Beryl jumped down to the ground and flung her arms about his neck, he added, in a lower voice:

"Where's Norman? I expected to find him with you, wherever that was. We parted, at eleven, to look for you in different directions."

"He has not found us, papa. Do you think he is safe?"

"Safe? why, what could happen to him? He didn't expect to bother himself any more about the fire, but to try and find his little wife."

"Well, he has not succeeded in finding us."

"My poor girl! This is a sorry celebration of your wedding-day. But, cheer up! Norman will put in an appearance, presently, just as I have. It's well for you, you are settled in life, Beryl, for your father is a ruined man! I have lost nearly everything. The insurance money—if I get it all—will not save me, and some of the companies are sure to break. Never mind! We'll go to Congress, after all! Why, Beryl, here are your vail and diamonds under the carriage!"

"I was so glad to see you, papa, I forgot they were in my lap."

"Well, take good care of them, child. I shall

not be able to buy you any more until I have made a second fortune. Bristow's a lucky fellow! He has lost nothing but his house and a few other buildings. I wonder what has become of him! However, we'll not fret about it. He'll find us before long. Meantime, the only serious question is, how are we to get some breakfast?"

That was a serious question, without doubt; yet, before night, the question of what had become of Norman Bristow became a still more important one. In vain, after getting his daughter housed with a friend whose home was not destroyed, did Mr. Ward hunt the city for the bridegroom. Had Mr. Bristow rashly rushed into danger, only to find himself surrounded—cut off from escape—as some other hapless men had done? Was his life a sacrifice to the fire? It looked as if it must be.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### "I CANNOT MAKE HIM DEAD."

THE terrible day which followed the fire wore slowly on—slowly to Beryl, in her unhappy plight, though all too swiftly to thousands of busy men engaged in providing the necessaries of life for their families, or striving to find what wreck of their business the great disaster had left them. The lady with whom the bride had taken refuge furnished her with a black silk, a world too wide for her slim form; yet better, in Beryl's eyes, than the mocking sheen of white satin and orange-blossoms. All day friends were coming to her to inquire, to hope, to wonder, to make vague efforts to cheer, useless suggestions—to advance theories, to console. Nothing altered the fact—Norman Bristow did not come. No one had seen him, heard of him, knew anything authentic about him after he had parted from Mr. Ward on Wabash avenue.

When dusk came, the young wife, utterly prostrated by the excitement and fatigue of the previous night, and the intolerable suspense of the lagging day, was compelled to act on her hostess's advice and go to bed; nor did she raise her head from its pillow for a week. No visitors, except Thalia, and one or two other intimate friends, were admitted to see her; the doctor had ordered quiet, or he would not answer for the evils which might ensue.

Many a heart ached in sympathy with the poor bride's; many eyes which had never seen her moistened at thought of her pitiful story. Was Beryl, herself, so very wretched? Yes, she was miserable enough. Not heart-broken, not desolate beyond all hope of future bloom, as if she had loved the husband snatched from her almost at the altar's foot—but frightened, awed, remorseful, weighed down by bitter self-reproach. Did she hope the man she had married was dead? No. She was no murderer at heart to harbor such a wish, even when she knew that his return would be the worse for her happiness. She prayed that he might be alive. She said to herself, wildly, that, if he returned to her, she would make up, in tenderness and devotion, for all the wrong she had done him in marrying him out of spite.

The world would never allow him to see that she was indifferent. She would never permit herself to contrast him with—with that other man she had once loved. She would be a good, faithful wife.

It was such an awful thing to feel that he might be dead—that man, in his vigorous prime, who had stood by her side the picture of health and energy, handsome, self-willed, strong; full of projects for their pleasure, ambitious, commanding admiration.

Often and often Beryl wakened out of troubled slumber with screams that rung through the house. Dreadful visions haunted her sleep, even more than her waking hours. No, oh no! she never was guilty of the wicked wish that her husband might be dead.

Day after day glided on. The sounds of hammer and saw, the crash of removing ruins, the clatter of brick and stone, all the multitudinous clamors of rebuilding arose from the blackness of ruin. Anthony Ward was busy from early in the morning until late at night, trying to save what he could from the wreck of his immense fortune. He found that matters were not quite so bad as he had at first thought. He was no longer wealthy; at the same time he was not in debt; and there would be fifty or sixty thousand dollars of insurance money with which to begin again. He did not care to re-engage in business until after the election. If he went to Washington he would prefer being free for the present. His daughter, thank Heaven! was a rich woman. If poor Bristow was never heard from, as his wife she was en-

titled to a third of his fortune, which was a handsome provision for her.

"Poor Beryl! poor little girl! How I dread going back to her with the same old story—no news! Her face turns so white and her lips quiver, and she looks so awe-stricken, poor girl! She must have grown to like him, after all, if she did make such a fuss when I first urged the matter! It's a sad thing for my little pet!"

Yes, the most painful thing Anthony Ward had to do, was to tell Beryl, whenever he returned to her, that there were no tidings.

At the end of a fortnight no one doubted that Norman Bristow had perished miserably the night of his marriage. His partners in the New York bank had not heard from him. Not even his bones appeared to remain on earth to show where and how he fell.

As soon as Beryl was able to sit up the lady with whom she was staying began to agitate the question of clothes. For once, there was no denying there was one of the dressy sex "with nothing to wear." The elegant bridal trousseau had perished in the flames. Her wedding-dress was, actually, the only dress Beryl possessed. It was to her like an ugly dream from which she must awake, when those around her began to talk about her "mourning."

It was the simple truth that she was a widow and must put on black. They fitted the girlish figure with those dreary garments. The first time she was able to come down-stairs she appeared in "widow's weeds."

No enemy who saw her could accuse her of not mourning for her husband. The face which had been soft and bloomy as that of a flower, was white and sad, with dark shadows under the tear-dimmed eyes. There was nothing bright left about Beryl but the glory of her golden hair.

Terror, awe and self-reproach had done the work of sorrow.

Whenever she caught sight of herself in the glass, robed in black, she thought of Helen Bristow. She could not shake off the idea that the frightful fate which had befallen Norman Bristow was Heaven's vengeance on him for the cruel way in which he had treated that first wife of his.

It terrified her more than ever to believe it, but she could not help it. It increased her nervousness to be reminded by her own self of Helen; but she could not help that, either. This pale, sad girl in black must own some sort of kinship with that other blighted woman whom Norman Bristow had killed by cruelty if not by quicker means.

Beryl never asked her friend Thalia what had become of Fennel Gray; but Thalia volunteered the information that he had returned to New York the day after the fire, and his name was not again mentioned between them.

Then came the proudest day in the life of Anthony Ward: he was elected to Congress. His friend Bristow had not been there to work in his interest, yet he was the successful candidate. He had plenty to absorb his time for the few weeks before he went on to Washington. He made many sales of lots made vacant by the fire, for he had about made up his mind not to go again into active business; by these sales he secured money for a winter of lavish expenses, while his insurance money, as much of it as had been paid, was placed in bank. He sighed to think that his dream of a brilliant society season was over. With his daughter in mourning, there could be no prospect of those festivities at which she was to have shown what Chicago could do in the way of beauty and elegance.

And now Beryl began to display a peculiarity of mind which caused her friends to shake their heads gravely; even her father, at times, believed that the sudden shock must have affected her, mentally, more deeply than they had at first seen.

She began to say that she did not believe Mr. Bristow was dead. She obstinately refused to draw any money as his widow, or to enter into any business arrangement with his partners. When they complained that she was putting them to inconvenience—preventing a settlement of affairs—she begged so earnestly for a few months' time that they had to yield:

"Give me six months!" she pleaded. "What is one little half-year? Surely the business can go as it has."

Then, when they desired her to at least draw her husband's salary, she refused.

"No, no, I will touch nothing—for the present. Papa is able to take care of me still. I should feel very strange to be using Mr. Bristow's money."

"What makes you think he will come back?" her father asked her when they were alone together.

"I cannot explain the feeling, papa; it is a strong impression."

"It is folly—madness, Beryl, for you to feel so!" Mr. Ward said, almost sternly. "If Norman Bristow were alive, what would be his object in remaining away—concealed from us—from his wife, whom he was determined to have? He is incapable of such a—an insane freak! There is no reason in what you say. Still, if it is any comfort to you, my poor little girl, go on deceiving yourself! It is *my* idea that you had best give up all hope and try to reconcile yourself to what has happened."

And still to Beryl would return the memory of a certain strange expression on the bridegroom's face, when he said good-by to her so lightly, as the carriage drove away from her father's house while he remained behind to assist in saving some of the more precious pictures and silverware from destruction. She did not recall that look so much at first, in the dire shock and suffering of the sudden blow; but as time went on, she dwelt on it more and more and it became more and more significant. It did, indeed, seem the madness they called it, to believe him alive; yet she could not change her mind about it.

"I cannot make him dead—I cannot!" she replied to Thalia, until the *confidante* was weary of the strain.

Thalia Conyngham had lost the man she had been so ambitious to win—had given up all hopes long before he married Beryl—and his death was not the grief to her it would once have been. She had never *loved* Norman Bristow; but she had hoped to secure him as quite the most eligible *parti* in her neighborhood. She lived only to make a brilliant match. Having given up her first choice, she was already looking about for a second.

"Oh, how I would like to spend a winter in Washington!" she said so many times and with so much enthusiasm; and flung out so many other little baits, besides—in the shape of wondering if Beryl would not miss her, would not need her friend, would not be better for having some one with her who sympathized—that, finally, the fish was caught—Mr. Ward invited her to join them and spend the winter with them in the capital. Very eagerly she accepted, and very extravagant were the toilets she at once ordered, and very bright her expectations of the conquests she was to make.

Beryl would no longer be a rival; Beryl was a *widow* now. She would have things her own way; her great dark eyes should do effective execution while the blue ones were quenched behind the mourning veil.

A day or two before they expected to start for the East Beryl received a curious epistle out of which she or her father could make nothing. It was contained in a soiled, coarse envelope whose direction had caused some difficulty at the post-office in deciphering, and it was at last sent to Mrs. Bristow in some doubt as to her being the one for whom it was intended. It had the post-mark of a little lumbering village far up on the shores of Lake Michigan, and it was addressed to

"MISS BURRIL BRISTO,  
"Chicago, Illinoys,"

and the contents were as follows:

"Miss Bristo wen I com tu town in about a fortnit I got suthin tu tell u wil cirprise u. Kepe ur pouder dri an trus in profdunse. Murdur wil out. I no wot I seen, no mistak. ur tru frend in nede,  
"ZACK G., lumberman."

"Papa! papa!" cried Beryl, white as a ghost, "it is something about Mr. Bristow!"

"Nonsense! I would to Heaven it were! My poor, poor darling, do not deceive yourself any longer. If you are going to cherish these wild delusions—put these forced constructions upon everything—it will be necessary for me to tell you some sad news which I had hoped to keep from you until after we reached Washington, at least."

The blue eyes turned to him with an intense look of dread expectancy; her lips moved but could not frame the question they wanted to ask.

"Something has been found," he continued, solemnly. "More than a week ago a body washed out from under the docks; the face was disfigured beyond the possibility of recognition; but from the height and shape of the figure, the color of the hair and the fact that the clothes were those of a gentleman in full evening dress, it was believed and pronounced to be that of Norman Bristow. It was necessary to get the body into its grave with little ceremony; and I, with some other of his friends, attended to it quietly. The story is in the papers, which I have purposely kept from you, as I

thought you would bear the tidings better in another place than here. So, now, my daughter, give up these vain hopes, these insane fancies, and bear your loss as bravely as you can. As for this silly, impudent letter from some coarse fellow who wants to get money out of you, let us put it in the fire and be done with it."

Beryl's brain grew dizzy and her sight dim. Her breast labored fearfully. Was it terror—grief—or was it a dreadful joy? The poor child could not have told had she studied her own emotions; at all events, they were too much for her—tottering into her father's arms she gave a little gasp and fainted.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### LADY CLAIRE AT THE CONFESSORIAL.

On the night following after the terrible fire, Fennel Gray started back to New York. For the last three months he had been in England, from which he had only returned a few days before his brief visit to Chicago—returned in triumph, having proved the right of the Gray branch of the family to the Sutherland estate, and obtained legal possession of the property for his uncle and himself.

It was very strange to feel himself a rich man, for he was now possessor of a handsome income and half of a fine estate—not a millionaire like the man whose daughter he coveted, but quite wealthy enough to satisfy his aspirations. His relatives in New York gave him a warm welcome; he had done great things for them as well as for himself; nor did Claire make an effort to hide the glad sparkle of her brown eyes or the telltale blushes on her fair cheeks when she greeted him.

A man less vain than Fennel could not remain blind to the encouragement given him by one and all; the uncle said, laughingly, "How fine it would be to keep the estate undivided," the aunt flattered and caressed him; while Claire's eloquent looks wooed him to speak.

Only two purposes were fully developed in the young man's mind—to place his mother in a happy home of her own, and to make another effort to win the young lady who had been too high a prize for the poor clerk.

He knew nothing of the present state of affairs in Chicago. While abroad he had not corresponded with Thalia, so had heard nothing. He scarcely feared that Beryl would ever marry his rival, whom she had scorned at the very altar and left to the punishment of publicity; he hoped, ah, how blissfully he hoped! that Anthony Ward would now look upon him with kinder eyes. As soon as possible after his return he set out on the long journey to the city by the lake.

Claire burst into tears when she heard where he was going. Then, at his look of surprise, covered her blushing face with her hands and ran out of the room.

"Poor foolish little cousin!" he thought to himself, looking after her tenderly, "it might have been possible to like you, for you are bewitchingly pretty and fond and fresh; but my heart was stolen from me before ever I saw you—stolen forever by a girl, fairer and sweeter than you, little Claire! Ah, Beryl, if you have been as faithful as I have, we shall have no more heart-breaks—only the most wonderful, the most rapturous happiness the world ever knew!"

He spent the hours of that wearisome journey in a dream more enchanting than the visions of Feramorz on that magical journey with the Eastern princess.

Arrived at the goal of his hopes, he shrunk from intruding too suddenly upon her who was so dear to him, but hurried to Miss Conyngham to first get news of her and her surroundings. There, the blackness of night came down on his world of delight—there the glittering bubble of his rainbow expectations dissolved in air—there, joy perished. It seemed he had come to the wedding of the girl he hoped to win—her wedding with that man of the shadowed past, whom he hated and despised.

What is that curious craving of the human heart which makes it desire to deepen its own misery by feasting on that most repugnant to it?

Fennel hung about town all day waiting for the hour that was to make his love another's. He haunted the vicinity of the church for hours before it was time for the ceremony. The fire that was gathering strength far away, had no interest for him. As soon as the church was open he slipped in, without a card of admission, and took his place as near to the chancel as he could get it. Here he waited, scarcely conscious whether the time was long or short, not

half realizing the long delay, nor the excitement about the fire which gradually drew half the audience away.

At last the bridal procession came; he saw with his own eyes, heard with his own ears the ceremony which gave Beryl to another. He sat in a stupor after the white-robed bride and her attendants had disappeared until the sexton shook him by the shoulder, ordering him out of the church, saying that in a few moments it would be in a blaze.

When he came out into that frightful glare which turned night into day, he wandered aimlessly on until he found himself, without any fixed purpose, sitting on the steps of the Conyngham residence, staring at the bright flames which were making their appearance far down the handsome Michigan avenue, and, not creeping, but flying nearer every moment, while the hot cinders were showering down at his very feet. He came to his senses enough to realize what it meant, and to determine to warn the Conynghams in time for them to get away in comparative comfort. He did not know that Beryl was in the house until she appeared at the door.

Words of bitter reproach sprung to his lips when he saw her; but he crushed them back and kept silence. During the remainder of that fearful night he did what he could for her comfort and safety, never once addressing her. When he saw her father seek her out the next morning, he concluded that Mr. Bristow could not be far away; and himself immediately left the vicinity. All day he wandered about, half crazed, thinking how like to those blackened ruins were the castles in Spain he had been building. At night he took the cars—crowded to overflowing with unhappy refugees—with-out having heard a rumor of Norman Bristow's disappearance, and in due course of time was back in New York.

A gentleman of elegant leisure now, time hung heavy on Fennel's hands. The glory was gone from his good fortune; there was nothing he cared for. Claire saw him return with that gloomy face with deep and secret joy. She loved him, and now she hoped to be the one to win him from his first dream to another as sweet. She sung to him, played for him, dressed in her prettiest to please his eye; she made him take her here and there.

"You shall not shut yourself up in that library and mope, cousin Fennel. Come, it's a glorious afternoon for an excursion to the Park."

"You must take me to Wallack's to-night, you ungallant fellow! You know I am dying to go."

"Miss McFlimsy will be offended if you refuse her invitation for the German."

So she kept him in attendance upon her, although she saw that his heart was heavy, his mind unwilling.

One morning, just after breakfast, she dashed into the library on some excuse to speak to him and was astonished at the face he raised from brooding over the daily paper as she came in. She hardly recognized it, it was so glorified—his eyes dazzled her, a strange smile played about his mouth.

"What is it, Fennel?" she asked, involuntarily.

"What is what?"

"Why do you look so—so happy?"

"Perhaps it was because I heard my cousin Claire coming," he answered, with forced carelessness.

"Poor little I could never make you look that way," she replied, with more bitterness in her tones than she had intended.

"You are a darling, bright little cousin as ever a man had," he said, with sudden earnestness. "If I had not loved another as a man of my nature can love but once, Claire, I dare say I should have been head over ears in the tender passion for you long before this. But with me it is love once—love always!"

"They never loved who say that they loved once," Mrs. Browning sang, and I believe her. I shall die an old bachelor, I suppose," returning to his bantering tone; "but it's all the same, for you wouldn't have had me, of course, even though I had never seen the other lady." He laid the paper on the table and rose. "I promised your father to come down to the office on business, Claire. Good-by, until luncheon," and he went out, still with that deep light shining in his eyes and that strange illumination of his generally sad features.

As soon as he disappeared Claire picked up the paper, urged by a burning curiosity to find if anything there had given him that expression. He had turned the sheet inside out before

putting it down; but she went patiently over it, column by column, and after a long search came on a paragraph headed, "Chicago. Norman Bristow's body not yet found. Search among the ruins. The young bride still prostrated by the shock," and underneath a brief account of the bridegroom's disappearance the night of the fire and the circumstances since, showing that, although his body had not been discovered, there could be no other possible theory except that he had met his fate by too brave a fight with the "devouring element."

"Fennel will marry that girl yet!" cried Claire, dropping her head on her folded arms on the table, and beginning to cry. "How his eyes shone! I could never light them into such splendor as that! And just because she is a widow! He did not dream how his face betrayed him! 'Love once—love always!' Ah, it pays me for that wicked trick of mine! How could I have been so selfish—so dishonorable? It weighs on my conscience like lead; I shall never be happy, or feel that I have any right to be called a good girl, until I have confessed my sin. Yesterday I could not have done it, because of the reproach I should have to meet; to-day reparation is again possible, and remembering that, he will not be so severe with me. Yes, I have made up my mind! When he comes home I will confess everything."

She cried to herself softly for a long time; there had been something in Fennel's manner of saying "love once—love always," that convinced her of the vanity of the hopes she had cherished. Of course, she thought that her heart was broken—that she should never love any one but her handsome, high-minded cousin—that "the world was hollow and her doll stuffed with sawdust,"—and she went about all the morning with listless steps, her brown eyes bright with tears, her red lips all quivering. At luncheon she had no appetite, not even for chocolate-eclairs and peach sorbets. She had, indeed, done a very wrong thing, and it was not easy to keep to her resolution of confessing it. It would have been enough to spoil her appetite, without adding the fact that she had given up her desperately-cherished hopes.

When the family left the table she crept to her cousin's side.

"Fennel, I wish you would come in the parlor a few minutes; I wish to speak to you, alone."

He looked down into her distressed face with some surprise.

"Certainly. My time is at your disposal this afternoon, Claire."

They went into the parlor together. Claire waited a few minutes until convinced that the others were not coming that way. She had taken a seat on the piano-stool. One hand idly thrummed the keys as she sat facing her cousin, her eyes downcast, her cheeks flushed, her whole expression one of such guilt and embarrassment, as to fill him with an uneasy wonder. Finally she looked straight at him for a moment, the tears glittering on her long lashes.

"While you were in England, cousin Fennel, I did you a great wrong."

"Did me a great wrong?"

"Yes, I did. And I'm aw—aw—awfully sorry about it, now"—sob—sob—sob.

"Why, what could it have been, my dear little cousin? Nothing very bad, I'm quite sure."

"Oh, but it was dreadfully bad—dishonorable! If—if I had not been—jealous—I never could have done it. It's been a weight on my conscience like a mill-stone."

At the hesitatingly-uttered word "jealous," Fennel started and looked more sharply at the fair penitent.

"Speak out, Claire," he demanded, in a less gentle tone.

Bursting into an agony of tears, she drew two letters from her pocket and held them out to him. He seized them, turned them over—their seals had never been broken—there was the monogram, B. W., and the handwriting he knew so well, from that one little note of hers which he had always preserved.

"I knew they were from her," the guilty girl faltered, "and I could not bear to think of your getting them; so I held them back, instead of forwarding them to England, as I should have done. They came very soon after you went over. There! now you know how foolish, how selfish, how wicked and base I have been! I don't expect you to forgive me. As she was married before I had an opportunity to confess what I had already repented, I thought then it would do no good, and kept silence until, this morning, I read in the paper that which made your eyes so bright, and, hoping it was not yet too late, I made up my mind to humble myself and give you your property."

"You have, indeed, done a very bad deed, Claire—worse than I could have dreamed. However, I don't like to hear you sob like that. There is nobility in true repentance. I dare say I shall be able to forgive you some time. As to the harm you may have done, I cannot tell the extent of it until I have read these letters. There, there! do not cry so! You are very young and thoughtless, little cousin; you did not realize what a very wrong thing you were doing." As he passed her, in haste to reach the privacy of his own room where he might open those long-detained missives, he raised Claire's drooping face and kissed her on the forehead.

"Stop crying, and I will try to forgive you," he said.

Never could the young man realize how dreadful that confession had been to the girl who made it, nor the amount of moral heroism it required, since it was not only to betray her wrong-doing, but the motive which had tempted her to it. She threw at the closed door, after he had gone, a despairing and indignant glance, as she muttered:

"Oh, you are in sufficient haste to get at those letters! Little pity you have for poor me!" and her burning cheeks quickly dried her tears.

Meantime, Fennel, in his own room, with the door locked—his heart throbbing audibly, his eyes glittering—took open and read those two sweet messages in which the writer had allowed her soul to appear.

"Oh, cruel, cruel, cruel! Cruel to her not to have answered them! Oh, Claire, Claire, what fatal mischief you have done! Now I understand how Beryl might have been driven by pique—in return for my apparent slights—to punish me by accepting that man! I see it all! Oh, Claire, how I would like to punish you! You could not have realized what you were doing! Beryl, my poor darling! what could you have thought of me? Ah, what a scoundrel I must have appeared in your eyes. Beryl, my darling, my own—to be so shamefully treated!"

He walked the floor in intense excitement. Yet, under all his trouble and distress over the past, there was an undercurrent of joy. Beryl had loved him all the time! *Beryl was free!* He had only to wait and time would bring him all that he coveted. As soon as it was decent to do so he would write to her, explaining everything.

In an hour there were his castles in Spain again standing on their golden foundations, more spacious, more splendid than before. The words the magician had uttered—the mystic spell which brought them into being—were only three—"Beryl is free!"

### CHAPTER XVIII.

#### WHITE ROSES.

BERYL and Thalia were engaged in conversation together late one brief winter afternoon, a few weeks after their arrival at Washington, in their private parlor.

Mr. Ward had not taken a house, as he contemplated, his daughter's mourning precluding the idea of that brilliant social success he had aspired to. They had a suite of rooms, and the two young ladies kept a maid.

Thalia was only too glad to step into Beryl's shoes and go with Mr. Ward whenever and wherever he wanted. The pair went out a great deal, for Beryl would have it so, knowing the ambition of both.

Thalia, for the first time in her life, was thoroughly satisfied with her lot. A superb procession of dinners and receptions made her days happy. She dressed elegantly, and her style of beauty was appreciated in the kaleidoscope through which she mingled. Her fine figure, her complexion like a fresh-blown calla, her flashing dark eyes and haughty carriage set off by numerous costly toilets, made her quite distinguished; so that her charms were pictured and her dress described by the Jenkinses at every grand reception. Just now she was pre-eminently blessed, for a French nobleman, friend of the ambassador, had paid her very particular attention for some days.

"I shall meet him at the dinner to-night," she was telling Beryl. "Do you know, I half-believe he has made up his mind to propose! I know very well how selfish those foreigners are—that he will not have me without a magnificent dot; but I think papa can satisfy him on that point. Papa can settle on me a couple of hundred thousands as well as not, and he must do it! How do you like my dress, dear?"

"I like it extremely. White is always most becoming to your type of beauty. Your jewelry suits the toilet, too. Those broad bands of

gold, and the pearls, are charming, for a change."

Thalis swept before the glass to take a good look at herself. She remembered how she had been jealous of Beryl's wonderful loveliness that night of the birthday ball, now it seemed ridiculous that she should ever have feared the rivalry of that pale, slim girl sitting by the window. At least, she feared it no more. Very handsome indeed were the face and figure she saw in the glass—a rich warm complexion with no more color in it than the velvety surface of a calla—purple hair—dark, brilliant eyes—a dazzling smile—the glimmer of pearls—the flash of gold—the sweep of a velvet train back from a stately form.

"Ah, I forgot to mention it, Beryl! Whose arrival do you think I saw announced in the morning papers?"

"How can I possibly tell, without going over the list of our dear five hundred friends?" was the mechanical answer—that sad face was not likely to brighten at the mention of many names.

"'Mr. Fennel Gray, Mrs. Gray,'" laughed Thalia, carelessly.

At that moment Anthony Ward came bustling into the room.

"Well, how do you feel this afternoon, my dear daughter? I am very sorry you would not go to this dinner with us—a very private affair. It spoils half my pleasure to think of your sitting here alone."

"Don't let it do that, dear papa. I prefer solitude—and I have a very interesting book here which will entertain me until I feel like retiring."

"Well, well, you will have your own way! I have ordered your dinner sent to your room, so that you need not go down to the dining-room unattended. Nora will be close at hand, in case you need her."

"Yes, papa, everything is all right. I shall have a pleasant evening, and am sure you two will have. Does not Thalia look well?"

"Magnificent! magnificent!" said Anthony Ward, with a pang at his heart to think it was not his own lovely daughter whom he was to escort. "Come, Thalia, call Nora to bring your wraps; the carriage is at the door."

The gas had already been lighted a couple of hours; the maid brought Miss Conyngham's wraps and placed them lightly about her; Beryl was kissed by the departing ones and left to the solitude she desired.

"Here's your dinner coming up, madam," and Nora, with the waiter who brought it, bustled about to serve the fair girl whom even the attendants liked and pitied—as Nora said:

"Such a shame she should be a widdy, an' she not much more 'an a child, an' that beautiful it makes the heart ache to look at her."

It was a light dinner that Beryl ate; but she very pleasantly gave the anxious waiter to understand that it was not his fault nor that of his tastefully-served dishes, and sent him away happy, leaving her with her *café noir*, her reading-lamp and her book. Nora returned to her sewing in one of the bedrooms, and the solitary girl was at liberty to indulge her silent thoughts.

"Fennel Gray, Mrs. Gray! Was Fennel married? Was this his wedding-trip? What sort of a woman had he chosen? Oh, that pretty cousin Claire, of course! Oh, what a mistake to suppose that he had ever loved her! Had not she always been the one to make the love—he, to make excuses, to defer, finally to treat with contemptuous silence? And now, he was married—so soon! Oh, she hoped she had not lost all womanly pride! Why should she feel so lost, so lonely, like one out alone in a frail boat in the midst of a wide waste of waters?

She took up her book—put it down again.

She went to the mirror and looked at herself—at her pale face, her black garments.

"I hate this dress!" broke from her trembling lips; then, she looked awed and remorseful as if she had insulted the memory of the dead.

"Oh, to be the thoughtless, happy girl I was the night of my birthday ball!"

She felt old, yet she was not nineteen. The caprice seized her to play to herself that she was that merry girl again. She went into her bedroom where Nora sat sewing.

"I feel as if I would like to wear white this evening, Nora. No one will be apt to see me; and white is mourning, too, you know."

"Yes, madam; I'm sure you must be very tired of those same dreary things. But you have no white dress."

"Oh, yes, I have one. I wore it last winter, at my coming-out party. It chanced to be saved from the fire, with a few other things. I think

it would rest me to wear it a little while," with a long sigh.

"Certainly, I'm sure it would, ma'm. Where shall I find it?"—*"poor young thing!" sotto voce.*

Beryl directed her where, and in a few moments, the deft hands of the maid were arraying her young mistress in the lovely, diaphanous birthday dress, with many an exclamation of admiring wonder at the metamorphosis produced by the change of raiment.

"I need a few pink roses. There are some fresh ones on the parlor table, Nora." The girl brought them. "Now, these in my hair, these in my belt. Oh, Nora, I feel like a different creature!"

"An' you look like a different creature. I wouldn't 'a' believed it if anybody had 'a' told me. Take a good look at yourself, madam! There! is there any lady in Washington can beat that?"

"You are a sad flatterer, Nora," said the young lady, with a faint smile.

"Not a bit of it! Can ye gild goold, as the good Book says? Can ye flatter an angel? If there was only somebody to see you an' admire you—there! there's a knock at the parlor door this minute!"

"But I cannot see any one, Nora!"

The girl was off to answer the knock before the remonstrance reached her, presently returning with a card.

"An' he'd like to speak with you, a few minutes, very much, madam, if you're disengaged, as he expects to leave town in the morning."

Beryl knew the name that would meet her eye before she glanced at it.

"Very well, Nora, I will see him. He is an old friend who has seen me in this dress before. I will explain to him that I had a fancy for trying it on and bringing back old times."

She very leisurely placed the remaining pink roses in her belt, that the girl might not notice her agitation. Certainly, Nora, with all her quick perception, would never have guessed that her lovely young mistress was going to meet the only man she had ever loved or ever would love.

The burning, bitter memory that she had sued and he repelled, gave her an air of cold pride worthy of a society queen of twice her years, as, having arranged the roses to her satisfaction, she went into the parlor to receive the visitor, standing, hat in hand, with flushed face and bright eyes, near the door.

As the exquisite vision floated toward him, all in white, and he saw the gold hair, the blue eyes—as a breath from the flowers in her warm bosom was wafted to him, he gave a repressed cry:

"Beryl!"

That cry told her the whole truth instantly. She paused, startled, the pink flying to her cheeks.

"Fennel," she said, tremulously, "I thought you had brought your wife."

"My wife!"—bursting into a merry laugh; "my mother, you mean. Beryl, let me tell you something quick, quick, before we are interrupted. I never received your blessed letters, written last spring, until less than a month ago. They were withheld from me purposely.

I was in England on business for my uncle. The day after my return from abroad I started for Chicago. I arrived there the day—the day

—of your marriage with another. Beryl, if I had gotten those dear letters, do you think I would have allowed any man on earth to again come between you and me? I came home, oh,

so happy!—for I came home rich, the owner of a handsome inheritance, more the equal in

*money matters* of Anthony Ward, and I

dreamed heavenly dreams of a bliss too great for mortals, and then—it was as if a bird, in

swiftest, rapturous flight, dashed itself to death against an unexpected obstacle. That night of

agony! The fire that raged and consumed was within my breast as well. I cannot speak of it, darling. Let us put all the foolish, mistaken

past aside. We can be happy yet. Tell me,

Beryl, is there now anything to prevent our being to each other, from this hour henceforward,

what I crave?"

He came close to her; he seized the little soft hands which yielded themselves to his anxious clasp. Her pride had melted into thin air; but enough of the old, mischievous spirit of the girl remained to tinge her reply:

"I do not know, Fennel. The future rests with you. One thing is certain: if there is any wooing to be done, you must do it! I have done my share," and then she gave him a dazzling smile.

"I accept the terms," he cried, and, in an instant, before she could resist, he had caught her in his arms and kissed her, for the first time.

"That seals the compact," he said, gravely.

"Then, perhaps, you are ready to take a seat."

"Can we really be alone together a little while?"

"A good hour." She went to the bedroom with an order to Nora to admit no other visitor, came back and drew her little rocking-chair near the sofa where he sat. Then each stole a long, happy look at the other. Fennel, by his travels, his wider experience (and that dignity which an estate confers), had improved immensely in self-possession, and the blue eyes recognized it at once, as well as that he was twice as handsome as ever, as they dwelt shyly upon him. The lover, studying that sweet face, asked himself if he had forgotten how perfectly charming it was, or if Beryl had grown more beautiful.

A little while they sat in blissful silence, only their looks speaking, while their hearts beat almost too rapidly for breath. Then their tongues were loosed, and the past and present were reviewed. There was one subject they could not altogether avoid, and at last Beryl touched upon it.

"Fennel, I have been a wicked girl. At times it seems to me that God cannot forgive me—that He will yet punish me in some still more terrible manner, for the wrong I did you, myself, and another. How could I—oh, how could I, because I thought you did not care for me, stand at God's altar and promise to love and honor a man whom I neither liked nor respected? It was worse than madness—it was wickedness! Oh, if I could warn every young girl in the world against the foolishness and sinfulness of marrying from pique, or for money, or position, or anything but deep and holy love! Oh, I have suffered tortures of remorse! I would give all I have to be able to take back the false words I uttered in that church. More and more I feel the dreadfulness of such a sin. Of course"—speaking very low and hurriedly—"when I promised to be Mr. Bristow's wife, I meant to be true and faithful to him as a wife, to try to like him—but the words were a lie. Fennel, it is horrible to be glad because of a fellow-being's death! I am not glad of Mr. Bristow's death!—I am sure I can say it, honestly. Could it be that he were to return to-day I would accept my punishment humbly—the punishment of losing you, dear Fennel—and try sincerely to be as good a wife to him as possible."

"Let us not talk any more about that," said the lover, shrinking from the subject. "Girls do not reflect when they do what you did—they act from an unreasoning impulse. I trust God has forgiven your fault, my own dear love. Try to believe that he has—try not to fall into a morbid state of mind about it. And now, we, who have both been so miserable, may surely be tempted to indulge in a taste of happiness. The certainty that we love each other is bliss enough for the present. I know that I have still your father's prejudices to overcome; that I have still a long penance of waiting before me."

"Yes," said Beryl, with downcast eyes, "I am in mourning, Fennel. You look at my dress—it was a caprice of mine to lay aside my black dress to-night. I shall believe in presentiments."

He lingered and lingered until Beryl had to insist on his going.

"I do not feel equal to having you meet papa to-night. Neither is it necessary for him, or any one else, to know that we have come to an understanding. Only think, it is but six weeks since—since—"

"I understand, Beryl; and I mean to be very discreet and patient. Ah, I suppose it will be a long time before we have another dear visit alone together, like this? The world, with its cruel conventionalities, stands between us. At least, I may tell my mother?"

"Yes, Fennel, tell her everything; and give her my fond love. You are taking her to Florida, you say?"

"Yes, for a brief stay. We shall be in Washington again before Congress adjourns. Then, I shall have a talk with your father. Now, I am contented to go and leave you, my darling. It would only annoy you to know that I was lingering about, and I want to be considerate of your feelings. So, I must say good-night and good-by, my love." He held her a moment in his arms, and went heroically away.

When the door closed between them, Beryl flung herself down on her knees by her chair, lifting up a tear-dewed face:

"Oh, my Heavenly Father!" she murmured, "I do not deserve to be so happy!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FOR WEAL OR FOR WOE.

AFTER the adjournment of Congress Anthony Ward brought his daughter on to New York and took board at the Fifth Avenue Hotel for a couple of months. There was nothing in the way of business compelling him to return to Chicago; his home there was destroyed; and, as there was only Beryl and himself whose pleasure was to be consulted, they could arrange matters to suit themselves. Their programme was a sojourn in New York, one of equal length in Newport, then, in the autumn, a visit to Chicago, before returning to Washington.

Beryl was secretly highly pleased at the prospect of being in New York so long; Fennel Gray was there, and that was enough to make that city the most attractive spot on earth to her.

Thalia came on from the capitol with them, as did also the French nobleman before mentioned; and here they parted as betrothed lovers, Thalia to go home and there commence magnificent preparations for a wedding in the early autumn, when Beryl, too, would be in Chicago.

Miss Conyngham's wildest aspirations were fulfilled, and she was returning in triumph to her friends.

On Fennel Gray's return from Florida with his mother the two had made a formal call on Beryl, in their way through Washington. This flying visit had been eminently unsatisfactory. Mr. Ward had been present; and, although receiving the whilome clerk he had once sought to disgrace with a degree of sauvity according with his changed station, it was not likely there could soon be any real friendship between the two. The lovers dare not allow even their eyes to speak; but Hope can exist and flourish on the merest fragments of a feast; and her rainbow wings played just as enchantingly around them as if one repressed sigh, one stolen pressure of the hand were not all she had to feed on.

Yet Beryl had brooded, ever since, over something gloomy and almost savage, which she saw or fancied in Fennel's expression. She longed for another confidential interview, thinking of writing to him, but kept patient by the thought that she would soon be in the city.

The day after her arrival at the Fifth Avenue she received a note from Mrs. Gray, asking her if she could not contrive to take luncheon with her and her son the next day at their home in Forty-second street. Fennel had rented a furnished house for his mother, not caring to buy until certain where they should wish to make their permanent home.

Fortunately Anthony Ward was to be engaged with political friends several hours of tomorrow, so that Beryl had no difficulty in sending an affirmative answer.

It was a flushed, lovely, slightly-embarrassed young lady who made her appearance at Mrs. Gray's at the appointed hour. The mother kept discreetly in the background for the first half-hour, and Fennel led the lady of his love into a cosey back drawing-room.

"I had more than half a mind not to come," observed Beryl, as he asked her to take off her bonnet, without even kissing her, though they were alone. "You know I assured you you would have to make the advances, this time; yet, here I am, making the first visit! Ah, Fennel, I hope this secrecy will not last much longer so far as papa is concerned. You must begin to court him, now! I am quite willing he should know how affairs stand between us. The sooner it is over the better. Don't you think so, too, Fennel?"

The sweet eyes that were raised to his face took on a look of perplexity, for, instead of a glad assent in his, she saw that dark, troubled, inscrutable expression. What he answered was this:

"It may be wiser to wait longer before speaking to any one, even your father," and he said it very gravely.

"Do you think so?" she asked, her lips trembling. "Perhaps I ought not to have come here; perhaps you think me unmaidenly—"

"No, no, no, my darling! Do not feel grieved at me. I have my reasons for delay. If you think they are that I do not love you enough, you are sadly mistaken. Every hour, every minute of my life, I love you more. My days are passed in longing for you. Oh, my sweet, you can never know what you are to me! Your love is fond and true, but it cannot fathom mine! No, darling, never distrust that! But, I have a trouble that is all my own. I cannot even share it with you. If you see the shadow of that trouble some time on my face do not notice it more than you can help; and, whatever happens, always believe that no other man

in the universe could adore your lightest smile as I do."

He caught her in his arms, passionately, as if he had been yearning to do so but had held himself under control, kissed her twice or thrice, then led her to a low chair before the fragrant wood fire which the chilly air of a day late in March made very pleasant.

"Sit here," he said, "and let me feast my eyes on you. Mother will be in presently. I asked her to leave us to ourselves at first. Well, Beryl, here we are, face to face, once more! That ought to content me for to-day. Let us be happy while we may. Let us throw care to the winds. Let us forget the past, ignore the future, think only of the rapture of being together—looking into each other's eyes, hearing each other speak. This room is our world—this hour our eternity." He drew his chair close to hers, took her hand, smiled into her eyes a strange, eager, pathetic smile.

He had spoken earnestly, almost wildly; she did not fully understand his tone or his look. Why should they "ignore the future?" Was not that future to be better than all the past? She met his intense observation with a question in her blue eyes, which he avoided.

"My darling! my own little love!" he muttered.

"You will call on papa before long, will you not?" she asks him.

"Certainly. I hope he will not be so cavalier in his treatment of me as he used to be. And do you think he will ever give his consent, dear Beryl, or do you fear we will have to marry without it?"

"I hope he will give a cordial assent, Fennel. If he refuses it, however, that will not affect us very deeply. We are bound to each other now by ties stronger even than filial ties."

"You say truly, my sweet love. We are bound to each other, for weal or woe, for life or death, for right or wrong! Is it not so? Are you not mine, dearest, forever and ever? Can anything part us? No, surely not. Why do I vex myself with such questions?" he asked, joyfully, smiling at her, radiantly. Yet, the next moment his eyes were fixed on the fire in moody reverie.

The same alternations of passionate delight with deepest gloom continued to excite Beryl's uneasy wonder; yet the three hours she remained in that house were the brightest of her life. Mrs. Gray came in, after awhile, giving their visitor so cordial and gentle a welcome as to make her feel at home. The three had a dainty luncheon in the dining-room, after which the good mother returned to her own room, knowing how seldom those two could be alone together, and how much they must still have to say.

"Do you remember that waltz, Fennel, at my ball?"

"Remember it! If you had spent an hour in Paradise would you be apt to forget it? It was a long while before I got over the surprise of it. I could not understand that you really meant it. My bliss was soon at an end, however. Then, as always, sneered the Mephistopheles—" he paused, abruptly, and a dark frown contracted his brows.

"Let us forget all that, dear Fennel," murmured his lovely companion, softly stroking his brown hand with her satiny palm. "It is not well to brood over troubles that are past; we have begun a new life—together."

"Over! 'Ay, there's the rub.' You are a wise little girl, Beryl. I will not brood—I will be happy," fiercely, "and you, too, my own. Do you know I have been dreaming of how pleasant it would be for you and I—and our mother—to go away from this part of the world as soon as we are married:

"Far off, to some sweet little isle of our own  
In a blue summer ocean, far off, and alone,  
Where a leaf never dies in the still blooming bower,  
And the bee banquets on through a whole year  
of flowers."

He smiled in his own gentle way, as he said it—the fierce fire had disappeared as soon as it had flashed up.

"You would not have me entirely abandon poor papa?"

"Of course not. There is always something to prevent the dream from becoming a reality," and he sighed, impatiently.

"Are you always so fitful in your moods, Fennel?"

"No, darling," starting, and looking at her in some alarm. "Am I fitful? Well, as I tell you, I have an annoyance, which I cannot explain. I dare say it makes me appear bearish. Now, I will tell you what I will do to atone for my peevishness," laughing. "I will walk back to

your hotel with you, Beryl, I will ask to speak with your father alone, I will tell him what we intend doing in the autumn—"

"In the autumn!" remonstrated the young lady. "Oh, that is quite too soon!"

"It will be a long time to me, sweet—it is all I can think of giving you! I will ask if he has any objections; and, if he has, will very politely inform him that I regret it, but that it cannot alter our plans. After that I shall be at liberty to call very often. You will not find me a cold or tardy suitor, my sweet," and his glowing eyes flashed a look into hers which brought the pink to her cheeks.

"I must go now, this very moment, Fennel. I have been here over three hours."

"Give me one half-hour more!"

"Ah, you are ungrateful!"

"I hope not, nor exacting; but, it seems so incredible for *me* to be so blessed that I live in constant fear of losing what is so precious to me. If this should be the last time we are ever to be happy together, it will be something to remember, will it not?"

"The last time! Why, your hand actually trembles! What a misanthropic person you must be! I really must go, Fennel. Papa was to be back at three, and it is half-past already. He will be alarmed about me. Please, let me go. You are coming with me, so what difference does it make! We shall not be parted just yet. There! I have found my bonnet myself; and now, you had better let Mrs. Gray know I am taking my departure."

When the pair were once on the street much of their happiness in being in each other's company vanished; they realized that it would not be pleasant informing Anthony Ward of their engagement.

It was full as disagreeable as they had anticipated. Having once scorned and shamefully mistreated the young man, it was impossible for the wronger to retrace his steps and begin to do him justice. In his eyes, Fennel Gray was still his book-keeper, and an impudent puppy. It was true that the young man was at that moment wealthier than himself, and of a better family; but he could not see it in that light. He complained bitterly that Beryl, with her beauty and position, had not made a brilliant match at the Capital, if she wanted to marry again. Look at Thalia! See what his chaperonage had done for her! Why, Beryl might have had her pick out of a splendid crew! And now here was this Fennel Gray again—faugh! However, the young man persisted in his rights, his daughter persisted in hers—he was helpless. He could show ill-humor, be ungentlemanly—he could not persuade an obstinate girl that she was making a romantic fool of herself—throwing herself away.

"You will have it your own way, this time, Beryl, I dare say! Confound the presumptuous understrapper! It's lucky he got that money, for I suppose you would have had him, all the same, without a copper. It won't be so bad to have a landed property in England. But, you might have done a hundred times better. You are sacrificing yourself like some sentimental school-girl."

His pining and fretting did no very great harm; at last, it seemed that the lovers had come to a period when they were free to be happy in each other's society. Out of respect to the memory of the dead the engagement was to be kept, for the summer, strictly secret; it was a very small matter, however, after their more serious trials, to have to be circumspect about seeing each other too often, or going out in public together.

## CHAPTER XX.

### NOT AT LIBERTY TO EXPLAIN.

NEARLY three months fled swiftly by before the Congressman and his beautiful daughter gave up their rooms at the Fifth Avenue and proceeded to Newport. Three months of what should have been serene happiness for the affianced pair. Beryl no longer was pale and sad, as befitted her black garments; she could not keep the light out of her eyes, the roses out of her cheeks, which would attest her health and hopefulness; yet she had not, for a single day, been entirely free of doubt and care on Fennel's account. She was learning that he was not the person she had supposed him, but a creature of singularly changeful moods—one hour, radiant, delightful, the most devoted of lovers; the next, morose, melancholy, imbibited.

After she went to Newport his letters were in the same strain—one page eloquent of joy and love; the next, dark with vague, formless hints of a desperate destiny which would prevent their ever realizing the life they anticipated.

And when, after a month, he came on to the

seaside to pay her a flying visit, she was shocked at the change in his physical appearance. His cheeks had grown hollow, his expression haggard, his movements nervous.

"You have been ill, and have concealed it from me, Fennel!"

"No, darling; I have been a little worried in my mind. I would explain it to you at once, but I am not at liberty to. Even my mother must not know of it. It will wear itself out in time. I believe half my ill looks are because I have been so hungry and thirsty to see you. I find that I cannot live without you. Ah, if a cruel Fate should again tear us apart, I should not suffer long. You have become a part and portion of me—a vital part—without which existence would be impossible. It is terrible for a man to love a woman as I love you!"

Beryl was sorely puzzled to think he should have a distressing secret which he was not at liberty to disclose; she could not understand it. Neither could she doubt the love which sometimes clothed itself in looks and accents almost painful in intensity. Sometimes Fennel would come to her looking like a man in a nightmare, so wild and haggard; once she said to him reproachfully:

"I am sorry my affection cannot make you happy. See, how blooming and well I am! I love you; I expect to pass my life by your side—and I am contented. But you are restless and dissatisfied; you are pale and ill; you scarcely seem to anticipate even our wedding-day with pleasure. I begin to fear that I do not understand you. I begin to be afraid of you."

"For Heaven's sake, Beryl, do not tell me that! Afraid of me? Then, indeed, I shall be miserable. Beryl, I am the happiest—the very happiest man in this whole wide world! Am I ill?—that is my misfortune. Have I fits of despondency?—they are caused by a passing trouble which will soon be over. Oh, my own heart's darling, to think I should compel you to fear your power to make me happy! Why, Beryl, sweet, ours is one of those cases of true love which there can be no doubt about. The first moment I saw you Heaven revealed to me that you were my mate; your own sweet eyes acknowledged that you felt it, too. I knew you were my spirit-wife when I drew you back from death in the chilly waters of Lake Michigan; I knew it, when your dear head rested on my bosom, and your little hand in mine during that waltz you gave me. I knew it even when—but, no more of that! That man's dark image shall not come between you and me. All that is over! You are mine. God permits it. I think it is only ecstasy that is driving me wild. When I am sobered down into a married man I promise not to vex or frighten my little love by any dark moods. And now, Beryl, when will you be wholly mine? This is the first of August—may I say the twentieth of September?"

Then Beryl brought forth the plea of "what will the world say?" and her lover had to argue that down.

"Papa wants to spend September and October in Chicago—I would not—I could not be married there!" shuddering. "I will be as good as I can, Fennel, and bring papa back the latter part of October. Then, in New York, or some other strange place, we can go very quietly into some church, with only the minister and a friend or two, and be married."

"Yes, sweet, and I will take you away where I can have you all to myself for awhile. Your father will have enough in Washington to absorb his winter—supposing we go abroad, travel about as long as we please, then finish the winter in England, on the family estate. I have word from there that the house can readily be put in living order; we can try how we fancy it, and, if we then grow attached to it we can make it our permanent home."

"I don't think I should like to make a home anywhere but in my own country; besides, papa would not allow such base desertion."

"He could spend part of his time with us; there is nothing to prevent. The truth is, Beryl, I have taken a fierce dislike to my 'native land.' I prefer living in almost any other. There! now I see you think me strange again. Well, darling, we will not attempt to settle any less important question at present. It is enough to fix the time of our wedding. Let us say early in October, since we are going to cross the water, for fear of stormy weather. Oh, why should there be such folly as consulting the world's opinion at all? Now is the time for our union; we are ready, yet we put nearly three dismal months of waiting and absence between us out of respect to the Mrs. Grundys who will, after all, criticise us just as severely." Then, almost crushing her two little hands in his uncon-

sciously-fierce clasp: "Beryl, marry me tomorrow! Say that you will! The ceremony can be private, and we will be off on the blue ocean before any one knows of it but your father and the clergyman. An evil presentiment haunts me that I shall lose you. It is that which makes me so nervous, so moody. I shall not be my own natural self, well and happy, until you are my wife. Cannot you make a small sacrifice of the proprieties for my sake?"

She hesitated, with face that flushed and paled. Her heart pleaded for him: she saw that he spoke the truth; she longed to bring him peace and comfort—to put an end to his morbid fancies. Finally, she whispered:

"If I can bring papa to consent, he shall go to Chicago alone, and I will go across the sea with you, Fennel."

They had been walking back and forth the interminable length of the Ocean House piazzas, on which the golden moon of a summer night shone down like a softer day. It was late, and Beryl cut short his rapturous thanks by assuring him that she must go in; indeed, her father came for her at the moment, to escort her to her room. Fennel stood looking after her slim figure until it was out of sight, then, with a repressed groan—the last sound you would have expected from the lips of a lover for whom the wedding-day had just been set—he turned and walked out into the street. The demon of unrest was on his back, whipping him on. With long strides he went through the beautiful moonlit avenue, with its blooming gardens and costly villas lining either side. Sounds of singing and laughter, of lovely piano-music, came softly on the dewy, scented air. From afar came the salt breath of the sea, and the haggard rambler wandered on and on until he found himself tramping the beach, where the silver-edged waves were gently curling and sighing.

Suddenly he stood still. His hat was in his hand, the meridian moon shone on his white face, bearded with the drops which were signs of his mental torment. There was a look of horror on it. There had come back to him—recalled with vivid distinctness by the glittering sands, the night and the moonlit waters—the memory of an evening in Florida when he had walked upon the sands and something had happened which had been the cause of all his moodiness since his return.

"It is too late to think of it," he muttered. "My doubts have vanished. My course is chosen. My only dread is the look in those blue eyes if she should ever hear of it. That look would be fatal as lightning to me, I believe. Oh, what a long and doubtful battle I have fought! Shall I enjoy the fruits of my victory? Will they not be dead-sea apples, ashes at the core?"

He wiped his pale forehead, letting the faint night breeze touch it coolly. A ghost sprung up on the verge of the glistening waters and came toward him waving phantom white arms. It was only the August fog, spectral in the moonlight, but it appeared to his excited fancy like a warning spirit, and it chilled him as it came close and clung about him.

#### CHAPTER XXI.

##### ONCE MORE AT THE ALTAR.

NEWPORT is at its very loveliest early in September. The sea fogs have kept away the frost; the carefully-plotted gardens are at their most brilliant epoch; the graceful cottages and gay villas, with their daring vividness of coloring, look brighter than ever under the deep-blue sky; the bay is a dazzling sapphire; the Virginia creeper on the old mill begins to show dashes of scarlet; the blue and vermillion chairs on numberless stately piazzas invite to repose and gorgeous dreams.

Beryl's wedding-day has come—her true wedding-day. She thinks of those two mockeries of the past with shame and horror, silently wondering how she could, first, have plotted so open and public a punishment of a bad man—second, have made up her mind to marry such a man only to show another that she had not quite broken her heart. She is wonderfully happy. Only one little cloud in the whole heaven of her life—the cloud of her dear father's displeasure. Anthony Ward is bitterly disappointed at the persistent choice of his beautiful child, and annoyed to think that she will not wait, at least until her two years of mourning are over. He is angry with Gray for insisting on a speedy marriage—"If they must make such fools of themselves, why not wait, and have, when the proper time came, a suitable festivity, instead of hurrying up matters as if they had something to be gotten out of the way, and doing it so secretly as if ashamed of themselves?" "You are neither of

you so old but you might wait two or three years without detriment to your future," he has told them, impatiently. But Beryl now is completely under her lover's influence. He does the love-making, as she once laughingly assured him he would have to, and does it with a vengeance! She is almost afraid of him at times. There is something intense to the verge of tragedy in his demonstrations of feeling. One moment he is gay and playful, the next, plunged fathoms deep in gloomy reverie. When Beryl wishes for an explanation of his changeful caprices, he snatches her to his bosom and tells her, in hoarse whispers, that when she is once his he will be steady and cheerful as a summer day—that it is the haunting fear of something even yet coming between them, which makes him miserable.

"Ah, Beryl, you believe that you love me, but you cannot measure my feeling for you. It would be worse than death to lose you now!"

Again: "I am quite certain that I should go mad, Beryl, if you were taken from me, now, after all I have suffered!"

"Lovers talk a great deal about going mad," was the mischievous response: "but they seldom do it, I observe. Why should you dwell so much on so remote a possibility, dear Fennel? It seems to be morbid. Only death can part us, and I don't feel a bit as if I were going to die."

"Ay, only death can part us," he repeated, earnestly. "And the sooner we are united, the better for my peace of mind."

It was this feeling of his which gave Beryl courage to bear her father's displeasure. She believed that the trials they had undergone had made Fennel nervously distrustful of his good fortune, and that the sooner she became his wife, the sooner he would recover the usual tone of his spirits.

She had sent quietly to her New York dressmaker for two or three dresses, such as would be required in traveling, and a simple white robe of India mull. The wedding was to be at five in the afternoon—was to take place in church—and was to be strictly private. Her father, Nora, her maid, and Mrs. Gray, were to be the only witnesses. The sexton of the church was bribed to hold his peace and not to open the church doors until the very moment before the arrival of the little party. After the ceremony they were to return to the hotel, the bride would change her dress and come down to tea as if nothing had happened; and that evening they would take the steamer for New York, embarking the next day on their voyage to England.

And now the day was here—a cloudless September day, flawless in its golden glory—and the very afternoon. Nora, seemingly much more in a flutter than her young mistress, dresses the bride in the exceedingly simple toilet prepared for the occasion.

Lovely as an angel—nay, lovelier, with that sweet earthly charm of a willing and beautiful woman—smiled Beryl, when the last touch was given, and she stood ready to go down to the carriage with her frowning but silent parent. Very youthful she seemed in the soft white dress, with the little white bonnet and muslin scarf trimmed with richest lace; very lovely, with the dreamy smile in her blue eyes and the palpitating color coming and going in her fair cheeks.

Anthony Ward's hard heart melted as he met her wistful look; he held out his arms and she nestled gladly to his breast.

"Oh, papa, you forgive me! I shall not go away from you without your blessing? Ah, papa, if you knew how happy I am you would ask no more for me. I'm quite sure there never was in the world a girl quite so happy as I am to-day!—except for the parting from you for a little while."

They kissed each other, and she felt that peace was partially made. Then Anthony Ward drew out his thick gold watch and said it was high time they were off; coughed, to account for the tears in his eyes, wiped them on his cambric handkerchief and gave his daughter his arm.

As they descended the stairs and went out in the face of a hundred loungers, male and female, Beryl was followed by admiring glances, but no one did or could suspect what was going on. There were plenty of ladies in white toilets those warm afternoons. It was only noticed how much prettier and younger she looked without that stuffy mourning, the gentlemen hoping she would not return to it.

"How shabby, to go in a hired barouche!" muttered the broken millionaire. "I never was at a watering-place before without my own establishment. I cannot get used to it!"

Beryl had heard such complaints all summer

and did not heed them. They had had one of the finest of the livery teams, with a competent coachman, entirely at their service, which had satisfied her. To-day she gave not a thought to the mode of their conveyance; it was ten minutes of five and she did not wish to keep Fennel waiting.

The comely Nora, whose bright eyes sparkled with excitement, climbed to her place, and the carriage turned into the gorgeous procession which at five o'clock on a pleasant afternoon in the season makes Bellevue avenue one of the "shows" of the world.

It nettled Anthony Ward to be there without his own carriage with its coat-of-arms, and his own coachman and footman wearing his colors; it nettled him to think his proud daughter was throwing herself away on a "nobody;" it nettled him to recall how obstinate she had been about touching the great fortune which, as the widow of a wealthy man, was hers by right. Her income had accumulated at the bank, and the partners had politely begged her to make use of it, but she had refused to have anything to do with it. It nettled him to reflect how different every circumstance would have been but for the great fire which murdered his son-in-law and lapped up his warehouses as if they had been crumbs. His discontent was visible in his face again as they drew up in front of the fine church. Another carriage had just drawn up; the sexton was opening the doors of the building; Fennel had helped his mother out, and now hastened to offer his assistance, but her father took Beryl out, just touched his hat to Mrs. Gray, and walked hastily into the vestibule with his daughter on his arm. The coachman began to grin; he had not, until that minute, suspected a wedding; he nudged Nora as she was getting down.

"Oho! is that the trick?" he asked.

"As true as you live," answered she.

"It's all right," the sexton was saying in the vestibule; "he has just gone in," referring to the clergyman.

Beryl stole one timid glance at Fennel—their eyes met—she blinked as if she had looked up at the sun! She had not dreamed that mortal eyes could be so bright! How handsome and happy he appeared! The lines were gone from his forehead, the shadow from his face. The merest stranger could understand that here was a contented bridegroom; love and a glowing rapture burned in his countenance.

Mrs. Gray was sweet and ladylike in her Quakerish drab suit: she gave Beryl a motherly kiss and told her how lovely she looked; then her son gave her his arm, Beryl took her father's, and they all walked up the dim aisle, where the glorious afternoon sunshine was transmuted into rainbow flecks of jeweled light as it fell through the long, arched windows of rich stained glass.

A calm and holy tranquillity fell upon Beryl's mind. The cool, dim atmosphere, the absence of a fashionable throng, the sweet feeling that she was giving herself to him who loved her so truly, and whom she so truly loved, filled her with unutterable peace. Even the clergyman, who was so often a party to the important ceremony, noticed the happy, tranquil expression of the young couple, who stood side by side, while he exchanged a few low words with Mr. Ward, and examined the license, not having had the opportunity of doing so before.

A knot of white violets at her throat sent their faint perfume to the lover's nostrils as he gazed down adoringly at the face of his bride; will he ever be able to breathe their delicate fragrance again without that sacred, that enchanted moment coming back to him?

Half a dozen spectators did intrude into the church before the ceremony began—idle people passing by, who, at sight of the open door and the two carriages, conjectured a wedding, and "were there to see." And now, the man of God was ready, and the young couple stood before him.

#### CHAPTER XXII.

##### THE PHENIX.

BERYL had put far from her all troubling memories of the time when she had been a party to that sad surprise in the sacred edifice when Helen Bristow had made her unexpected response to that solemn charge on the part of the minister:

"If any man know just cause or impediment why these two should not be united in the holy bonds of matrimony I charge him to speak or forever after hold his peace."

When these words were now again spoken how could she help her thoughts going back with a rush to that other unpleasant hour? She

could not, although she had hoped to keep her mind free from the past. But why should her lover tremble at that grave adjuration? She felt that he was trembling, and her eyes, seeking his face, found him ghastly pale.

But, hark! What is that? Is she dreaming? Is the spell of the past so strong upon her that her senses are being self-deceived? Does some one speak? Does the clergyman pause and look about him, startled? Is her brain swimming—her heart on fire? Was it ages ago or was it now that she heard a smooth, cold, too-well-known voice say: “*I forbid the marriage. The woman is my lawful, wedded wife.*” She struggles as with the fetters of a hideous dream; she slowly forces herself to turn—with ashen face and anguished eyes that shrink from beholding what still they are fascinated by—and there, not five paces away—standing where a broad bar of crimson light falls red as blood on his pallid, smiling face—is Norman Bristow.

“Oh, but that man is dead and buried ages ago,” thinks Beryl. “That proves that I must be dreaming. Fennel, dear Fennel—” she turns instinctively to the bridegroom as for protection against some frightful danger; her eyes are so blinded she can hardly see him; she catches at the altar-railing for fear she may fall.

“What is this? Who is this?” speaks the clergyman, sternly.

“It is true, what he says,” stammers Anthony Ward. “This man is my daughter’s husband; but we have believed him dead for nearly a year. He was supposed to have been killed in the Chicago fire—perhaps, you may remember seeing it in the papers. He was married to my daughter that night, while the fire was raging—went to help—and we never saw him afterward. I am sure I do not know where he has been, and why he kept his safety a secret from us. Bristow, this is strange, by Jove! Not but that I am glad to see you, old fellow! But, I’m afraid you’ve made—a mess of it!”

There was a cruel smile on the lips of the returned absentee.

“I meant to. It has been at very great inconvenience to myself that I have accomplished this little surprise. But, I have done it—to my satisfaction. It is not very flattering though, is it,” he remarked, easily, to the clergyman, “to find one’s wife ready to marry again in six weeks less than a year?”

The minister made him no reply but looked at the young couple standing stricken before him with anxious pity.

Beryl stood, clasping the railing, white as death, her blue eyes wide open but blank as the eyes of a somnambulist; she heard every word spoken, but far off as if people in another world were talking; she looked blasted.

Fennel had turned fiercely at the first sound of that unexpected voice—turned, with glaring rage in his eyes, his lips drawn back from his white teeth, looking like an animal about to spring. He had not the aspect of a person surprised—only desperate. All the little time it had taken to say what had been said he had continued to glare at the enemy who had arisen as it were out of the grave, between him and his dearest hopes. Now, as Bristow threw out this sneer against his wife’s constancy Fennel sprung at him. His hands were about the sleek white throat of the sneerer. The attack was so sudden that the other did not at first defend himself; but, presently, he began to struggle for his life, and there in “the dim religious light” of one of God’s sacred temples ensued a scene such as does not often violate the sanctuary.

It was all that Anthony Ward, the clergyman and two other gentlemen could do, to tear him from his choking victim; but they did so after a time, and forced him into a seat.

“For shame, sir!—in the house of God!” panted the minister.

“Forgive me,” murmured poor Fennel, with a look of such misery, such complete despair, that it was long before its recipient could forget it, “I did not stop to think of that. I regret it. But there are worse crimes than giving a scoundrel his deserts, even before the holy altar. To sell a child to Mammon—to refuse honest love for her, and truckle to the selfish passion of a sensualist admirer—to be a wife, without love, is worse! First scourge these hypocrites out of the church, good sir, before you express too much horror at my fault! As for that man, I will kill him at sight! Let him look out for himself! He and I can no longer live in the same world together, that is certain! Why did I not have my revolver with me?”

As he was saying this, Norman Bristow, having regained his feet—and his breath—went up to that white statue clinging to the altar rails.

“Well, sweet,” he said, mockingly, “admit now that ‘turn about is fair play.’ You did not dream how much of an Indian I am, when you leagued with the fair Helen to play me that trick. I vowed then I would some time play you one full as successfully. I have done it; and now we are even; and I, for one, am ready to cry quits. Just think! I have kept away from my young bride almost a year! The

play is over now; we will go home, and settle down into a staid married life like other people’s.”

As he concluded his little speech Norman Bristow very lightly touched with his own one of her small gloved hands. She started as if stung by a serpent, looked about as if for some way of escape, saw Fennel, ran to him, and flung herself into his arms.

“Kill me, kill me, Fennel,” she pleaded. “I cannot, *will not* live! Ah, if you and I could die together, dear! Let us go down to the water and drown ourselves! I will *not* live to become that man’s wife,” she repeated, looking piteously at those around her. “I never cared for him! Papa was determined I should marry him. Fennel and I have always loved each other—he saved my life once!”—here Mr. Ward took her out of Gray’s arms.

“Remember,” he whispered in her ear, “you are a married woman, Beryl! Do nothing indiscreet. Make the best of things, now that they have turned out as they have. For my sake, Beryl!”

“Oh, papa, what shall I do? Take me away from Mr. Bristow! I will promise never to see Fennel again, if you will keep me safe from that man.”

The clergyman was evidently unhappy at having such a drama enacted in his church; still, he could hardly order these very respectable people out; and he was more interested in the scraps of their history which they were betraying than he cared to show; he felt very sorry for the young couple who had come to him so serenely radiant a little while ago, and yet—Mr. Norman Bristow he had heard of as a bright ornament in Western society. Oh, despicable spirit, that truckles to the rich and powerful!

“How can I promise you, my dear?” murmured the father. “Your husband has rights superior to mine. I know he will be considerate; he will not refuse you time to reconcile yourself to the effort to make a good wife.”

“Oh, I will be very considerate,” sneered the intruder. “Now that my little jest at your expense is successfully played out, Mrs. Bristow, I can patiently wait for advances from your side. I am not so ardent a lover as I once was. Still, I think I may say that I have more real respect for you than this *very honorable* gentleman, who was on the verge of wiling you into an illegal companionship, knowing perfectly that your legal husband was alive and well.”

Every eye turned on Fennel Gray, over whose white face rushed a furious flood of scarlet shame.

“That is another of his falsehoods! Tell him so, Fennel!” cried Beryl, seeking his averted eyes.

For a moment there was dead silence; then his enemy said:

“He dare not deny it. He remembers a certain evening, when he met me in Florida, too well to disclaim it now!”

“Fennel! Fennel! is that true? Look at me—answer me!” With a crushing sense of fear and pain she was recalling the strange, variable moods which had tormented her lover since his return.

At last he slowly raised his miserable eyes and looked her in the face.

“As God is my witness, Beryl, I was not *positive* the man I met on the Florida sands was Norman Bristow. I *hoped* it was not. I said to myself—‘How can it be, when he is dead and buried? It is true,’ I thought, ‘his body was never so identified as to leave no room for doubt; yet, if he were alive, why should he, of all men on earth, be in hiding?’ If he had survived the disasters of that terrible night, he would have sought out the beautiful girl he had just married, and of whom he was madly enamored. There is no reason why he should be alive, yet keeping that fact from his friends and business partners. I only *imagined* that strong likeness between him and the man I met on the beach, and saw only by moonlight. My brain is touched, with all I have suffered, and I have fancied this striking resemblance.’ That was the way regarded it, Beryl. There were hours when I had other convictions—when I could not doubt whom I had seen—but I set that down to my nervous state; I honestly believed that it was a delusion which haunted me—that I was becoming a monomaniac. Beryl, you will not believe me so base as to think I could have known this! Why do you look away from me? Why do you moan and tremble so? I would have died of grief before I would have harmed you, Beryl. Speak to me! Say that you see how it all might have been!”

But Beryl only turned to her father, saying in a low voice: “Take me away from everybody, papa. *Slide me in.*”

“Yes, take her home, Mr. Ward,” interposed the minister. “I would counsel moderation and—and patience, to all parties. The young lady is certainly very unhappily situated at present. But time works wonders—time cures every ill. Give her time, Mr. Bristow. And I wish you all good-afternoon.”

#### CHAPTER XXIII.

##### A STRANGE VISITOR.

ANTHONY WARD led his daughter out of the church. The sun, near setting, threw a flood of gold over everything. A bird was singing in the ivy creeping up the church tower; the long procession of glittering carriages was still rolling by; the flag on the villa opposite waved languidly but brilliantly; young ladies and graceful cavaliers swept by on handsome horses; the snowy sails of distant yachts caught a rosy flush; a single glimpse of deep blue water showed between the houses; in the despairing glance which the girl cast about her she saw it all—but saw it more as we imagine disembodied spirits see things—her earthly interest in them had perished; it seemed years since she had entered the sacred building, full of hope and bliss—she must be an old, withered woman now, she fancied.

Her father placed her in the carriage and got in beside her, making a motion to Bristow not to follow. Nora, drowned in tears, took her seat, and they returned to the hotel, the coachman not being able entirely to repress the eloquent whistle with

which he would have liked to emphasize his wonder.

The loungers saw them return as they had gone, and were no whit the wiser; the lovely young lady was very, very pale, that was all.

Meantime, Fennel and his mother, the latter silently weeping, got into their carriage and were driven back to their hotel. Not a word was spoken until they were in their own little parlor, when Fennel said:

“I am glad he was not too late. That would have been still more terrible,” and then, trying to reach a chair, everything reeled around him, he stumbled, and fell.

Mrs. Gray had to send for help to get him to bed, and a physician, who bled him, for his face was purple and his veins swollen. It was a week before they could get away from Newport to the more welcome privacy of their own home. In that time Mrs. Gray had inquired and learned that Anthony Ward, his daughter and Mr. Bristow, had left for the West.

Weeks dragged wearily on. The bracing autumn weather had no effect to benefit Fennel’s health or spirits, both of which had failed him. Sallow, melancholy, without appetite, or interest in any living thing, he haunted his mother’s house like some ill-conditioned ghost. Mrs. Gray was seriously alarmed. She could see but one way to save her son—to manage to arouse him to pity for some one besides himself. One dull, rainy October day, as he sat moodily staring into the cheerful wood fire which enlivened their back drawing-room, she drew her chair facing his, picked up his lean, limp hand, which she gently stroked, and began:

“My dear boy, do you know that you are breaking your mother’s heart?”

“Why, no, I hope not,” he answered, gloomily, “that would be hard on you, dear mother.”

“Do you suppose I can see you always so despondent without feeling so myself? Fennel, be a man! Rise above your disappointment. The girl you love is another man’s wife—it is your duty to pray that she may become reconciled to her lot and gradually learn to accept such happiness as comes to her. It is your duty and you must face it! Beryl is very sweet, lovelier than one in ten thousand, but not the *only* pretty and lovable girl of the nineteenth century! You, who have felt the bitterness of a fondness for one you thought did not return it, ought to feel for others suffering the same pangs. There is Claire—so bright, and pretty, and spirited, and so foolish about you! She would make you a dear little devoted wife, my boy. I should be glad to see you marry Claire. The poor little thing is actually losing her damask roses—and all for you.

Fennel groaned, snatched his hand away, got up and walked the floor.

As chance would have it, there was a ring at the door, and the servant showed Miss Claire into the sitting-room.

“You did not expect to see me this rainy day, did you, dear aunt? May I take off my waterproof and stay to tea? Harry said he would come after me this evening. How do you do, Fennel?”

The soft brown eyes were full of unspoken pain and pity, as she laid her little palm in her cousin’s.

Yet it was not natural for Claire to be sad. She was a merry soul, gay as a bird; and despite her unreturned love and the soror pang of feeling that her misconduct had brought unlimited trouble on the man she adored, she could not be altogether mournful. She sat down by the fire, having filled her lap with rainbow-colored flosses for some wonderful needlework she was doing. Fennel, silent in the corner of the comfortable sofa, could but notice how pretty she looked, with the ruddy firelight playing over her chestnut hair and blooming face and little dimpled hands.

Patter, patter, patter, went the rain outside—the room was certainly more homelike for having Claire in it—and he allowed his glance to linger on her longer than it had ever done before.

Perhaps she felt it; or perhaps it was the warmth of the fire brought a richer hue to her cheeks. In and out through silken meshes went the bright-colored floss, the white hand fluttering like a dove, the merry voice chattering to his poor, depressed mother until she actually began to look cheerful.

“Oh, auntie, I have a new song. I brought it with me to sing to you, for I knew you like singing,” and the embroidery was flung aside, the long closed piano opened, and the music placed on the rack.

It was not a sentimental song—Claire was not singing her sorrows at the man who rejected her affection—but a gay little thing out of the last opera-bouffe. Fennel noticed how his mother brightened up and looked kindly at the young girl.

“It would please both of them,” he thought, “and what does it matter to me? I have no love to give Claire—she knows that. If she is satisfied to take me with my heart gone out of my body, I don’t know why I should refuse her the miserable privilege.”

Then, again, every sensibility recoiled from the idea; it was impossible.

The early darkness came down while Claire still lingered at the piano, softly singing and playing in the delightful twilight made by the fire. A servant came in and put on a few more sticks of the fragrant maple wood; they blazed up, making the room as bright as day, betraying two diamond tears hanging on the curved lashes of Claire’s brown eyes. Her cousin saw them flash and fall.

They were summoned to a cosey tea. Mrs. Gray looked smilingly at her young visitor, urging her to partake of everything.

“We eat so little, it spoils our appetite to watch each other. I am convinced that we should have company at every meal. Fennel has actually eaten three oysters! Claire, come and spend a month with me; I know there is nothing to prevent.”

“Mother’s bound to have her way,” was her son’s silent comment. He felt too weak and indifferent

to make any resistance to the siege he saw she was about to lay.

While still at table, the door-bell again rung.

"That must be Harry, come for me," said Claire. However, it was not Harry—it was a lady who called to see Mr. Gray on business, the servant said.

"Did she not give you her card?"

"No, sir. But she looks like a lady, sir."

"Where is she?"

"I showed her into the little reception-room."

"Is she young?" asks Fennel, rising to his feet—a sudden thought has set his pulses to racing through his veins.

"A middle-aged lady, I should say."

At that his color died out as quickly as it had risen; he turned cold and irritable, saying, impatiently: "Well, I'll soon see who it is."

He was gone a long time. More than an hour passed, and still the interview with the nameless lady continued in the little reception-room. Claire lost some of her brilliant color; Mrs. Gray fidgeted. Harry came for his sister, and being impatient to get back to his Latin, she had to go with him, her keen curiosity about the stranger unsatisfied.

Shortly after, the front door again closed and Fennel came in to his anxious parent, who saw, immediately, that something of importance had occurred—his eyes sparkled, his countenance and manner betrayed intense excitement.

"Has Claire gone?" he asked. "I'm sorry. I wanted to ask her to stay with you for a week or two. Mother, I start for Chicago to-night!"

She stared at him in amazement.

"Who was your visitor, then?"

"I am not at liberty to tell even you, dear mother, at present. It was a person I was glad to see—though I may have cause to be very sorry."

"Not—Beryl?"

"No, no, indeed. But I must pack my bag, instantly. I have less than an hour to get the nine o'clock train. Mother, something very strange has happened! It may be for good—I fear it is for evil. If I can, I will write to you the particulars after I reach Chicago; but that will depend upon what I learn after I have seen parties there."

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

##### A MAN'S RAGE TURNED AGAINST HIMSELF.

It was true that Norman Bristow had deliberately plotted to marry Beryl and leave her as soon as the ceremony was over. He was one who never forgot or forgave an injury; and he had convinced himself that Beryl was in the plot with Helen to confound him publicly.

While he was abroad he brooded over it with black resentment; and on his return set about to win a revenge which he considered would be satisfactory. He would again woo the proud, malicious beauty; if he succeeded in winning her, he would turn the tables by laughing at her in church when he got her there. The great fire, however, changed his plan, at the last hour. Instead of marrying her—to prevent her ever getting another husband—and then leaving her at the very altar, he would enjoy a still more complicated revenge; he would leave her in fear and suspense.

He, too, had seen the hated face of Gray as they came to the altar. Oh, how rich a revenge, to allow this fellow to hope again, only finally to baffle him! It was a sudden inspiration of the Evil One—no time to arrange the details—but he had the money for a long tour in his pocket, and so could absent himself from his friends and his bankers for some time without great inconvenience to himself.

The frightful fire spread and raged, while his bad thoughts grew as hot and fierce. Such a joke! Here was the chance given to play it to his heart's content! He made his way to the water. He had picked up a rough overcoat from the stock of some store; enveloped in this, his hat drawn over his eyes, there was little danger of recognition from any of the excited, frightened refugees who had sought the shores of the lake. Getting possession of a small boat he had rowed out into the lake and there finally decided what course to pursue. If he took any one of the trains out of Chicago he could hardly fail of being seen by some acquaintance. Better to begin his journey from some strange station. Why not spend a few weeks hunting in the north woods? it was just the season. He resolved to do so. He paddled slowly for some hours; then rested, in the boat, until after daylight; went ashore, and soon obtained a breakfast of coffee and ham and eggs at a farm-house; rowed a few miles further, until weary; and so on, for several days, until he found himself far enough from home for his purposes. He bought a rifle and hunter's costume at a lumbering village, hired a scout to go with him, he having taken an assumed name, and did have some fine sport, shooting deer, fishing, etc., until late in November. But, to show how difficult it is for a man to successfully hide himself when he wants to, a lumberman, who had once been a longshoreman in Chicago, recognized him, and reading in a paper weeks old something about his marriage and disappearance, wrote the letter we have seen to Beryl, knowing Miss Ward and her father well, by reputation.

Tiring of solitude, he came down to Detroit; went East from there, but being too well known in New York or Washington to tarry in those cities, took a pleasure-trip to the South; then to the Bermudas, and returning, was wandering on the moonlit beach, one evening, late in February, down in the old city of St. Augustine, when he unexpectedly confronted—of all men in the world!—Fennel Gray, also wandering and meditating. He believed that Gray recognized him—though he met his startled gaze with the quiet indifference of a stranger—and, thinking it time to hasten the close of his delightful comedy, he followed that young man North. Here, by a course of espionage and masquerading, he discovered what

was going on, kept himself informed of the affairs of the unconscious lovers, and brought about the dramatic *finale* in the Newport church.

And now, how had life fared with Beryl since that sunny September afternoon when her sun of joy set suddenly in darkest clouds? So frantic was she—so perfectly desperate—whenever Mr. Bristow attempted even to speak with her, that, bold as he was, he was obliged to check his audacity for the present. To prevent her committing suicide her father was obliged to give her his solemn promise to protect her against her husband.

"I will not live with him, papa!—I certainly will kill myself if you join with him and trap me into being left alone with him one single hour!" and he had not dared to venture on a bolder plan.

No sooner had they arrived in Chicago than Mr. Ward saw he had committed a blunder in taking his daughter where the history of her heart affairs was so well known, and where the rumor of Mr. Bristow's return upon the stage of this world was creating an immense excitement. It was so decidedly unpleasant that three or four days of it disgusted him. Business required that he should remain some time; but Beryl must be gotten out of it as quickly as possible.

"What shall I do with you, Beryl?" he asked.

"Let me go with Thalia, papa. She is willing to take me with her to Paris. Monsieur Ardenne has seconded her invitation warmly; and, indeed, since you took such good care of her, and were the means of her meeting M. Ardenne, I feel quite at liberty to accept. I shall feel like another creature, when I get out of this country," eagerly.

Anthony Ward felt greatly relieved by this proposition. Thalia was to be married in less than a week. Beryl would not appear at the wedding; but busied herself preparing for her trip abroad. Though not so well able to afford it as once, Mr. Ward came down handsomely with the money for her outfit; for his daughter would be in the way of meeting the best society in Paris.

"Curse it!" said the irascible father to himself, "Bristow will get tired of her obstinacy and seek a divorce; it will not be too late for her to make a splendid marriage over there—a count or a duc—who knows? By Jove, she's handsome enough! And she'll be out of the way of that detestable Gray. Matters don't look so dark as they did yesterday. I must give Madame Ardenne instructions to throw some fine milord in her way"—and with this prospect in view, the sorely-tried gentleman plucked up some spirit to face his old acquaintances.

Fennel Gray need not have rushed off to Chicago in such hot haste, since he found, after arriving there, one bleak autumn evening, that the young lady after whom he had come to inquire had been gone across the blue water for more than a month.

Oh, how his pulse leaped when he heard that! For the first time since he walked out of the Newport church, he held up his head like a man. She was not living with the dastard who had played her so foul a trick! That was what put heart into him. True, she was bound to him by the solemn bonds of the marriage ceremony, but she was not actually his wife!—she had fought against that degradation. True, she could not be his—but, neither was she that scoundrel's! He had not expected, in coming to Chicago, to see Beryl personally—he came to ascertain whether or not she was living with her husband. If she were, then his new-made discovery was of little worth—was, indeed, of actual harm; but, if she were not, it remained to be seen what next could be done. To him it appeared right to seek Mr. Ward for positive information, although rumor had placed him in possession of the facts.

He was received with chilling coldness; Anthony Ward had never, never could favor Fennel; he looked upon him as the marplot who had spoiled everything—that, had it not been for him, Beryl would long ago have been Bristow's contented wife. However, he answered his questions when they were such that he could not avoid it. "No, his daughter had not become reconciled to Mr. Bristow." "Yes, she was in Paris under Madame Ardenne's charge." "Why, yes, he thought and hoped they would make it up, some time—that was far the best way." "Yes, Mrs. Bristow expected to remain abroad all winter."

"And now, let me give you a piece of advice, Mr. Gray—never speak of my daughter again—never think of her. She never can be yours. You are quite young enough to form another attachment. I hear you have a beautiful cousin. The quicker you choose some one else to fill Beryl's place the wiser you will be. The less you see of any of us, the better. I wish you good-morning."

As Fennel turned to leave the room, after this dismissal, some one tapped lightly at the door, immediately opened it and stepped in. Fennel turned rather pale when he found himself face to face with Norman Bristow.

"What is this fellow doing here, friend Ward?" he asked, insolently.

"I am attending to my own affairs," answered Fennel, before Ward could reply, "which is more than you are doing when you venture to interfere with me," and he returned the stare of the black eyes with one as haughty.

"Do you insult me, purposely?"

He had not dreamed how he hated the man whom Beryl loved, until this moment revealed to him the dark depths of his own passions. Had he been triumphant—had his wife been living with him—had not her dread and horror of him overpowered even his purpose to compel her to a wife's duty—he could have laughed maliciously at the other lover; but defeat had not improved his temper. To see Fennel there aroused the lurking devil in his blood. Quick as a flash, when he asked the question, "Do you insult me?" his revolver was in his hand, and pointed at Gray.

"Don't shoot!" screamed Ward: "you'll only

make a row!" while Fennel sprung at his foe, to disarm him, if possible.

The weapon was fired before he could prevent it; but Fennel's dash at him had weakened his aim; the next instant there was a struggle, and soon the revolver was in possession of the other man; and Bristow quivering with rage, saw that he had lost his weapon, missed his aim, and wounded his friend. Anthony Ward was groaning with a shattered hand. His face grew even a darker purple; his eyes had murder in them; he made a panther-spring at Gray, who remained cool enough to act only on the defensive, but he never touched him; suddenly his hand went up to his head, he staggered, and fell.

"You have killed him!" cried Anthony Ward.

"I did not fire. I did not touch him," said Fennel.

The sound of the shot had, by this time, drawn a few people, passing in the hotel corridors, to open the door and crowd in. One man was bleeding—another on the floor. They took hold of the man with the weapon in his hand, and who was startled and white, not knowing what had happened to his enemy. A physician among the spectators stooped over Mr. Bristow. After a moment's surprised examination and feeling of his pulse, he said:

"Why! this is a fit of apoplexy!"

It was true, Norman Bristow had too much blood, and was not of the temperament to make it safe for him to indulge in unbridled rage. That terrible rush of purple to his face betrayed the congested state of his brain. He had punished himself.

"Let go of me," said Fennel, to those who held him. "I have done nothing but take his revolver from him," and Mr. Ward confirming this, and stating that his friend had wounded him by accident, the young man was allowed to go free.

"You see, you never bring me anything but bad luck," remarked Ward, bitterly, as Fennel hoped he was not seriously injured. "Never mind how much I am hurt! If poor Bristow goes off the hooks, now, I suppose you will get your will, after all," with a savage look.

Bristow did not, however, "go off the hooks." For days he remained in a critical condition. When he was finally out of danger, and began to get around it was with the frightful consciousness that he was no longer a man of magnificent health, but one whom indiscretion in diet, or a burst of passion, might fling helpless at any moment. Then he hated Fennel Gray more than ever. To him he set down his loss of health, as well as his wife's dislike. A deep, sullen resentment took the place of his former haughty contempt; but the doctors had forbidden him to excite himself; if he was to have revenge on his rival, it must be in some subtle, quiet way that would necessitate no personal meeting.

How could he strike the lover so surely as through the loved? He had been far too yielding to the girl who bore his name. She was his. Those blue eyes might flash dislike—those soft lips might tremble with scorn—they would be the sweeter to him, for their loathing would make his revenge completer! His mind was fully made up as to the course he would pursue. About Christmas, as soon as he felt sufficiently restored—he quietly made his preparations, and quitted Chicago, without telling any one, even Ward, where he was going.

Mr. Ward had quite a serious time with his hand, and it had not improved his temper; however, it was by this time restored to usefulness, and he was in Washington, solacing himself for his domestic complications with his political triumphs.

Fennel had, in the meantime, been at home—leaving Chicago as soon as Bristow was out of danger—hard at work, for his uncle, who was engaged on a case in court in which he took a great deal of interest, and in which the nephew took still more.

Claire made herself very charming to Mrs. Gray, at least, at whose house she spent more time than at her own; and one evening in mid-winter when she was again there to tea, a lady again sent in a message to her cousin, without a card, and he again went to the reception-room to see who it might be; and it had proven not to be the lady who had come the first time. Who it was and why she came will be known in due time.

#### CHAPTER XXV.

##### IN THE SNARE AT LAST.

MONSIEUR and Madame Ardenne and their lovely guest are at dinner in one of the gay salons of their suit of apartments. They are all dressed for the evening, Madame Ardenne very richly, and wearing all her diamonds, for, after the opera, her husband intends taking her for a couple of hours to a grand ball given by a fashionable friend of his in high life. They are endeavoring to persuade Beryl to go with them to this ball, who realizes her equivocal position too keenly to have mingled in society with them at all, except to go to such public places as involved no social duties. She had reveled in the picture galleries, enjoyed the promenades, the drives, the theaters—had been a constant attendant at the opera—but had steadily refused invitations to private fetes. Half the Parisian fine world was raving about her, nevertheless. Her youth, her soft, fair, flower-like beauty—the romance attached to her story—for M. Ardenne had not concealed that she was a wife who would not live with her husband because she did not love him, which sounded very funny and very charming to the French—had made people eager to see *la belle Americaine*.

The duchess who gave the ball had sent a request that she would attend it, and her friends were still, at the last moment, doing their best to persuade her who would not be persuaded.

"No—no—no, indeed, dear Thalia! I should feel dreadfully out of place. Besides, it is too late! I am dressed well enough for the opera, but not for such a grand ball. I couldn't consent to be eclipsed by my chaperon, and you look magnificently to

night. Pale blue velvet of the right shade—is the finest color in the world for a brunette—except white. You surpass yourself, Thalia.

Yet Beryl—though perhaps not in the fullest of toilets—was looking particularly lovely. She had been out all the afternoon in the fresh air, until her eyes sparkled and her cheeks were the most delicate pink. She wore the splendid diamonds which her father had given her for a wedding-present, with pale blush roses in hair and bosom, and her dress was a sufficiently becoming one. She had “banged” her hair, and it glittered in little feathery golden rings across her white forehead, giving a piquancy to her expression, well calculated to drive an admirer wild. She looked sweet as a sweet child; yet there was a touching sadness under her gayer expression which perhaps made her deepest charm.

“I think you ought to go, to please us,” said Thalia, a little impatiently, for she really desired it.

“Then I must go,” answered Beryl, but her eyes filled with tears, and her friend was sorry.

“No, Beryl, you shall have your way about it. If it will make you unhappy you shall not go. Come, love, it is time we were putting on our cloaks—Antoinette will bring them down to us in the parlor. Louis, we will allow you but one more glass of wine. We must be off in ten minutes.” Madame set down the dainty little Sevres cup of *cafe noir* which she had taken at table, smiled at her husband, rose and went into the blue salon, followed by Beryl, where the maid brought them their white cloaks, their bouquets, gloves, fans; and by the time these were arranged monsieur had finished his wine and come after them; the Ardenne carriage, with its coronet and its two liveried servants and its spirited span, was at the door, and the little party set out for the Grand Opera House.

As usual, a hundred lorgnettes were leveled at the ladies as soon as they were seated in their box. Thalia had the triumph of knowing that to many her dark, superb beauty seemed finer than her friend’s fair loveliness; as she lived for admiration this was pleasant. But Beryl felt always somewhat annoyed at the attention she drew. She would willingly have worn a vail, had such a thing been admissible. She looked about her very little, giving her undivided attention to the stage. This evening it was as usual; everybody looked at her and she at no one.

By this she missed seeing a pair of black eyes fixed on her from the opposite side of the house—a pair of eyes whose smiling look would have smote her like death had she met it.

When the Ardennes and their guest came down the grand staircase into the lobby, after the play was over, there was a moment’s discussion about Beryl’s getting home. They offered to take her home first, before proceeding to the ball; this, she declared, was not necessary, as they would be late at the best—the night was not cold, let the coachman drive first to the *fête* and afterward home. So it was arranged; and a pair of ears playing eavesdropper behind them, in the crowd, heard every word.

Monsieur and his bride said good-night to their companion under the *porte-cochère* of the grand mansion where the ball was taking place, and then she was driven rapidly along the smooth boulevard toward her own hotel. Whether the drive were long or short she did not note, she was lost in dreams of the past, and was still in a dream, when the carriage stopped in front of their residence, and the footman, leaping down from his perch beside the coachman, opened the door and handed her to the pavement. Then he ran up the steps and rung the bell. It was at this precise moment, when he was at the door which Antoinette was coming to open, and the coachman on the box was managing his impatient horses, and Beryl had her little slippers foot on the first step, that a powerful man—who had sprung from a cab which came up and stopped behind the carriage, and at which the lady had not even glanced, for there were other occupants of the apartments of the hotel besides her friends—seized her suddenly about the waist from behind, clapped his hand over her mouth, carried her to the cab, thrust her in and climbed in after her. Beryl was so astounded that she could not scream. The footman ran and clutched at the cab door as it was closing.

“Fall back!” said a stern voice, in broken French; “interfere at your peril—this lady is my wife!”

Magic name, which gave him unlimited power over his victim! The servant stood away, the driver lashed the horse, and the vehicle dashed down the boulevard, until it came to the first turn, which it rounded and disappeared.

The coachman tried to gather his dull wits together and decide whether or not his master would wish him to give pursuit.

“She is his wife,” murmured his *confrere*.

“It will not do to interfere between husband and wife,” said the man.

So he drove away to take his place in the long line of vehicles awaiting the breaking up of the ball, while the footman went in the house to discuss the extraordinary mishap with the maid.

Antoinette foreboded that her mistress would not like it; in fact, she was so troubled in her mind that she resolved to go to the house where madame was visiting to inform her of what had happened.

The footman gallantly escorted her; but two hours had elapsed before the Ardennes were communicated with. They came home—Thalia in a great state of excitement and distress; yet, after they got home, what was there to do?

Thalia sat up all night and cried; her husband sat up and tried to comfort her.

“If I alarm the police they will refuse to interfere. When you think of it, that they are married, perhaps it is best. He must be very fond of her, after the way she has treated him, to follow her so far. Now, they really must settle their own difficulties.

my darling. It is folly of you to dim your bright eyes with weeping—and with sitting here till the sun comes up.” And about daybreak Thalia retired, drying her tears, to a few hours’ slumber, resigning her friend to her fate.

To return to Beryl.

When the cab rattled away over the smooth street and she, thrilled to terror by that voice, looked, and saw by the passing flashes of the lamps, that it was indeed Norman Bristow sitting opposite her, with a smile on his flushed face, a feeling of absolute despair came over her.

“Why I declare!” he observed, maliciously, “my wife looks as if she did not appreciate my devotion in coming so far for her! I expected a warmer welcome. Nay, my love, it will do you no good, though you split that pretty white throat shrieking to the police; they will not divide man and wife. At last you are completely in my power. I have forbore to exercise my rights with most unexampled patience, Mrs. Bristow. Now I am come, in earnest.”

She looked across the small space between them with a stony gaze.

“Where are you taking me?” she asked.

“To Boulogne—to England—home.”

The carriage whirled rapidly along; he sat studying her face with that evil smile; not a word more was spoken for some time; finally the horse slackened his pace; Mr. Bristow looked out the window.

“Here we are, at the railroad station,” he said. “You may make a fuss and outcry if you choose. It will do you no good. The instant I utter the cabalistic sentence—‘The lady is my wife—she is a little deranged,’ you will see people and officials shrink back. You had better take things quietly.”

She answered this mild advice with no word; but the moment he had helped her out of the carriage and she found herself in a little crowd of waiting passengers, with a couple or *gens d’armes* not far away, she ran toward them with uplifted arms, crying desperately, in French:

“Save me! I do not want to go with him! I will not! He shall not compel me! Protect me, until I can send for my friends and I will give you a thousand francs.”

At sight of the lovely face and mention of the money and friends the two guardians of the peace seemed disposed to assist her, until *l’Américain* coming up cool and smiling, informed them that “the lady was his wife and a little out of her head,” touching his own forehead significantly.

“I am taking her to England, to an asylum; the physicians here can do nothing for her. Pardon the opera toilet—I had to induce her to come with me by a pretense of going to the theater.

The look of blank horror at his falsehood which Beryl turned on him might easily have been mistaken by a prejudiced eye for the excitement of insanity. The *gens d’armes* shook their heads and looked rather compassionately at one so young, so beautiful, yet so afflicted, drawing back, however, with the air of giving up any interference. Bristow took her by the arm, and pushed her through the crowd to the platform by which the cars were standing.

Had she attempted escape, dozens of hands would have been outstretched to arrest her, for the story of her madness had run through the little throng, universal attention having been attracted to her by her strange movements and singular dress. Ladies in white opera cloaks, diamonds and peach-colored silk robes did not appear at a station every day! And this one was so young and fair, so graceful and refined, it was sad—ah, it was a pity!

It seemed that Mr. Bristow must have already gotten his tickets and selected the compartment into which he now forced his companion.

“Well, my dearest, here we are, snug and comfortable and as solitary in this place as if we were in the desert of Sahara. I have seen to it that we shall not be disturbed until we arrive at Boulogne.”

A bell chimed midnight faintly, from many parts of the great city came the striking of the clocks; the guards cleared the platforms; the train moved out—faster, faster—but under the cold eyes of the wintry stars looking down on her despair.

#### CHAPTER XXVI.

##### A NIGHT RIDE.

The starry night had changed to a dull and misty wintry morning. On the pier at Boulogne stood two persons, looking about them while the officials were overhauling their baggage—a tall, fine-looking young man and a pale, dark-eyed woman. They had crossed the Channel in the night and were just leaving the little steamer, to take the train for Paris.

The lady looked ill, but her features wore an expression of indomitable will and resolution. Her companion’s manner to her was exceedingly kind and attentive—nothing more.

“I am afraid the roughness of the Channel has been too much for you,” observed he, remarking her paleness.

“It is nothing—nothing! A few hours more and we will be in Paris! That thought sustains me.”

He gave her a curious, searching look.

“You do not care for him, do you?” he asked.

“Care for him! I love him as I love the serpent which has stung me. For years, long years, after he ceased to treat me with anything but cruelty, I did love him better than my own life. That love is trampled out—not a root remains. But—you know my fears! He has three days the start of us. In those three days he may have wrought a lifetime’s wretchedness for another. I think only of her. Surely, you must feel a more terrible anxiety than I do. Mr. Gray?”

His clear eyes met hers with a hopeful look.

“I do not feel as troubled as I should think I would

under the circumstances. It seems to me that we cannot fail, after having triumphed over so much—as if the angels would protect her I love for still another little while. I am weighed down by suspense and dread, and yet I feel nothing like despair.”

Their very light luggage having been permitted to pass they proceeded to the railway station. Their train would not start for nearly an hour. Hearing that the train from Paris was in, they had the curiosity to watch the passengers disembark.

“You get whiter and whiter—I fear you will give out, after all, Mrs. Bristow.”

She looked up at him with a sad smile in her still beautiful eyes.

“I have endured too much to give out now.”

“How astonished Beryl will be to know that you are in the land of the living! She will refuse to believe you other than a phantom! I did, you know, for some little time.”

The lady shivered and caught at his arm.

“Heaven grant that I am never buried alive! I came near enough to it, that time! Ah, it was horrible, lying there in that trance of the body while my mind was as acutely active as ever! I heard all that was said—knew all that was being done, yet I could not force an eyelash to quiver to save my life. The nightmare horrors of that ride in my coffin—all night in the cars, think of it!—are to be hardly thought of, much less described. Then the moment of agony, of suspense, when they opened the coffin-lid at home to gaze on the poor, pale features of their lost one! It was too much for human endurance—the spell snapped and gave way—I sighed, I opened my eyes—Mr. Gray, Mr. Gray!” suddenly changing her tone to one of startling eagerness, “who is that?”

“Where?”

Helen pointed, with a hasty motion, to the last figure emerging from the train—that of a woman descending from the platform of the middle first-class car. Others also had noticed her, and quite a crowd was gathering about her—and no wonder!

To see a young lady of the most extraordinary beauty, lovely as a Peri, in full evening dress, her

“dazzling” with diamonds, only white slippers on her pretty feet, get out of a railroad train, would be surprising enough to excite the liveliest interest. Add to that her *being alone*—and to that the fact that her face was white as snow, her blue eyes wide open, with a wild, fixed expression, her rich dress more or less disordered, her whole appearance that of a person to whom some terrible thing had happened—or who was *mad*—and it can be faintly imagined what a sensation there was.

The guard immediately stepped up to her, motioning back the crowd; he knew what her husband had said about her not being right in her head, and he indicated as much to the on-lookers.

“But, where is your husband?” he asked her.

It was at this moment Helen drew the attention of her companion to the scene.

“Is not that—that is—”

“My God, yes! Beryl!”

“What can have happened? What is she doing here? In that dress?”

Fennel did not stop to ask or answer questions; he hastened forward, and, in a moment, had clasped Beryl’s cold hands in his own.

“Dear Beryl, I am here! What is it?”

She gave a low scream as she fell into his arms.

“Take me away! take me away!”

“What is it, my poor darling? Has that scoundrel dared—” his voice choked.

“Take me away! take me away!” she kept on moaning.

“My dear child, you have your friends here,” spoke Helen, too. “Tell us what we shall do.”

Beryl glanced at her blankly. “It is you, Helen?” she said, dully, too dead to everything about her to evince surprise that one she had thought to be moldering in her coffin, should thus appear before her in a far, foreign city.

“Yes, it is I. Cheer up, dear girl; I have good news for you! I have succeeded in getting my divorce annulled; Mr. Gray’s uncle took the case, and now, I am Norman Bristow’s wife once more, and you—are free.”

The guard had quitted the young lady for a moment to examine the compartment of the car she had left. The crowd was still staring with unquenched curiosity at the group, wondering what strange, romantic episode was transpiring.

A police officer or two stood looking on. The guard came running out of the compartment looking very much disturbed. He pointed to the young lady and said to the officers:

“Arrest her! She is mad. She has murdered her husband!”

There was a stir among the spectators; the cry ran from lip to lip. The police stepped forward and laid their hands on those lovely shoulders covered only by the white opera-cloak.

“I did not murder him,” said Beryl, with a look of horror, “he died. He has been dead two hours. Yes, for two hours I have been shut up there with his corpse. Do you wonder that I am almost mad? Fennel, dear Fennel, save me from these men! Oh, this is a dreadful dream—a hideous dream! To have him by my side *dead*—struck dead while he was tormenting me! It seemed to me I, too, should die, or lose my reason before these dreadful cars would stop. Fennel, these people must not touch me.”

“I am afraid you will have to remain under arrest a short time, my darling; but they shall not molest you more than is necessary. A physician will be able to tell, immediately, what Mr. Bristow died of.” A low moaning near him called his attention to Helen, who had sunk to her knees on the floor and buried her face in her hands. “Poor Mrs. Bristow! it is a shock to her, after all!—she loved him once!

Oh! how I wish I could speak their language as I ought! Beryl, you must tell these men, plainly, that your husband had suffered one stroke of apoplexy before, and that this attack was not unexpected. They will keep guard over you a few hours until the doctors have examined the body. You must telegraph to your friends in Paris at once to come on here. I hope, by afternoon, the matter can be straightened out. Ask them to take you out of the crowd into the waiting-room; here is a cloak of Helen's to throw over your light dress. Cheer up, my darling; all will be well."

So it happened that Thalia had not yet aroused from the uneasy slumber into which she had fallen, after her wakeful night, when her husband came in with a telegram.

"I have news from our young friend. She is at Boulogne and asks us both to come on as quickly as possible."

"Oh, Louis, how can I ever exist until we arrive there without knowing what has happened? Did she explain nothing?"

"Here is the telegram:

"MONSIEUR ARDENNE: I am in great trouble. Will you and Thalia both come as soon as possible?"

"BERYL."

It was a long, strange, solemn day passed at Boulogne. The coroner, who was summoned to sit on the body of Norman Bristow, where it reclined on the seat of the car, soon decided that the death was natural, though brought on by violent excitement. Still, a guard was kept on his companion, until her name, residence, position, etc., could be ascertained. She was detained at the depot, where the corpse was also brought and a coffin sent for.

Helen Bristow wept for hours. Now that he had gone forever, she recalled the fond love, the girlish tenderness she had once felt for him whose rigid outlines now showed motionless beneath the sheet thrown over them. Her love bloomed anew, for a brief time, as you have seen a rose come out on a leafless bush late in November.

Beryl could shed no tears. The awful night she had passed had affected her nerves seriously. She could not even bring herself to look toward that part of the room where Norman Bristow's body lay. She saw him smiling, wicked, triumphant, full of life, beside her; saw his gloating smile turn to a distorted grin—his face change, his eyes roll, his chin fall—oh, the dreadful terror, and the still more dreadful relief when she realized that he had died. It was all too terrible for her as yet to gather any hope or joy from finding Fennel near her.

With him it was different. He, too, was shocked and pained at the sudden death of his rival; but it did not prevent mad throbs of fiercest joy to think how Beryl had escaped a ruined life, and would some time in the future be his own. While she sat there, white and still and weary, his eyes drank in deepest happiness from the sight of her. He could no more calm down the rising tide of hope than he could keep the ocean from its floods.

At the close of the rainy, cheerless winter day arrived Monsieur and Madame Ardenne; with them Beryl was finally permitted to go, having paid all her expenses, and her friends having seen to it that the body was sent on to Paris by the night express.

In a day or two there was a quiet funeral at *Pere la Chaise*, not utterly undewed with tears, since Helen shed many over the new-made grave. To Beryl the whole thing was such an unutterable horror that she dared not think of it. As it was, she was ill for many days.

It was decided that she should remain in Paris, with her good friends, for the present. She had no home to go to in America; her father was immersed in politics; and she felt unequal to meeting her old acquaintances in Washington society.

In vain Fennel pleaded his long waiting and once bitter disappointment as reasons for their immediate marriage.

"I must have rest and peace for a little while," she told him. "I do not like to come to you with shaken nerves and weary mind. Give me time to recover from these shocks, dear Fennel, and I promise to prove to you that I can be grateful. Go back to America when Helen goes; shut up your house there—it's only a rented one, I think—and bring your mother here in May. You will see how happy, and how handsome I have grown by that time," and she laughed, rather mournfully.

Meantime, Helen, before going away, fully explained to Beryl how—after coming out of her cataleptic trance and being restored to her usual health—she had resolved to allow those who knew her unhappy history to continue to consider her dead—her husband and all.

Living in such complete retirement with her sister it was easy enough to do this; and she would have remained *incognito* all her life had she not chanced to learn enough of Beryl's position to convince her it would be to the benefit of others to come out of her retirement. She had gone at once to Fennel Gray, who had advised her to employ his uncle and very quietly seek to have the unjust divorce set aside.

#### CHAPTER XXVII. "PERFECT DAYS."

It was the very first day in June—none more perfect ever rose upon a world of bloom. Faint flecks of clouds high up in the deep blue sky; a rippling breeze, making low but tumultuous music with the leafy greenery on every side; waters sparkling, birds singing, roses blushing. A picturesque old English mansion stands in the midst of pleasure-grounds—a lawn like velvet, shrubs in bloom, a lake glimmering and dimpling at its foot; a broad carriage-drive sweeping up to an ample terrace and porch; vines

fluttering from the turret; windows open; a flag flying from the tower; servants crowding about the wide hall entrance; a carriage coming between the stone pillars of the gateway and whirling quickly up to the stone steps, while a handsome young master of the house hands out his bride, and the "retainers" courtesy and bob their heads and say among themselves, "How lovely she do be."

This is Mr. and Mrs. Fennel Gray, three days married, coming to take possession of the home prepared for them. Fennel had accepted his uncle's proposition to live—at least for the present—on the Sutherland estate, and here he has brought his bride, whose blue eyes are brighter than the evening star, and whose delicate cheeks have regained their divine tinting.

"Oh, what a lovely—what a heavenly old place!" she cries, kissing her husband in the very face of the smiling, gaping servants. "Oh, Fennel, how happy we shall be here!"

They were married in Paris, and not in church, either—Beryl felt that she could never essay another church ceremony—safely and surely wedded for all time, and, as they hope, for all eternity. They had the civil marriage before a magistrate, and the religious service in Thalia's *salon*, with none but their faithful friends for witnesses. Everything went off quietly and satisfactorily—Monsieur Ardenne declared that the bride looked like an angel; and after that they proceeded, through London, homeward, and were welcomed royally by bee, bird and flower, breeze, cloud and sky, laughing water, waving wood, bridal roses, holy lilies.

They had two or three months of bliss all to themselves; then Mrs. Gray came to stay with them; followed, not long after, by Anthony Ward, who pined for a sight of the face of his only child; and who, when he saw with what mild dignity his son-in-law supported the character of a gentleman of leisure, became more reconciled to him.

Before Christmas, cousin Claire was added to the party. She felt a little shy of accepting Beryl's cordial invitation—for she was very conscious of having made a little goose of herself—but the desire to go got the better of her hesitation. Once arrived she felt no further embarrassment, as she found that she had recovered from her light attack of "first love," and no one ever unpleasantly reminded her of it. On the contrary, Fennel had been kind enough to invite to his house a young gentleman of his acquaintance—an American artist visiting in London—who took a wonderful fancy to Claire's sunny brown eyes, wavy chestnut hair, bright smile and unfailing good temper. He painted her portrait, and after that indicated a desire to possess the original; and Claire was too thoroughly kind-hearted to care to disappoint him. She has been his wife a good while now; but she is as piquant and impulsive, and almost as childlike as ever.

Helen Bristow received a third of her husband's large fortune. She has used a portion of it in erecting a magnificent monument over the grave of the man she never wholly ceased to love.

Anthony Ward is up to his eyes in politics: but he has his hours of loneliness; and has teased his children to dispose of their English property and come home to live, that he may enjoy the society of his little grandson, whom he adores. They have promised to do so.

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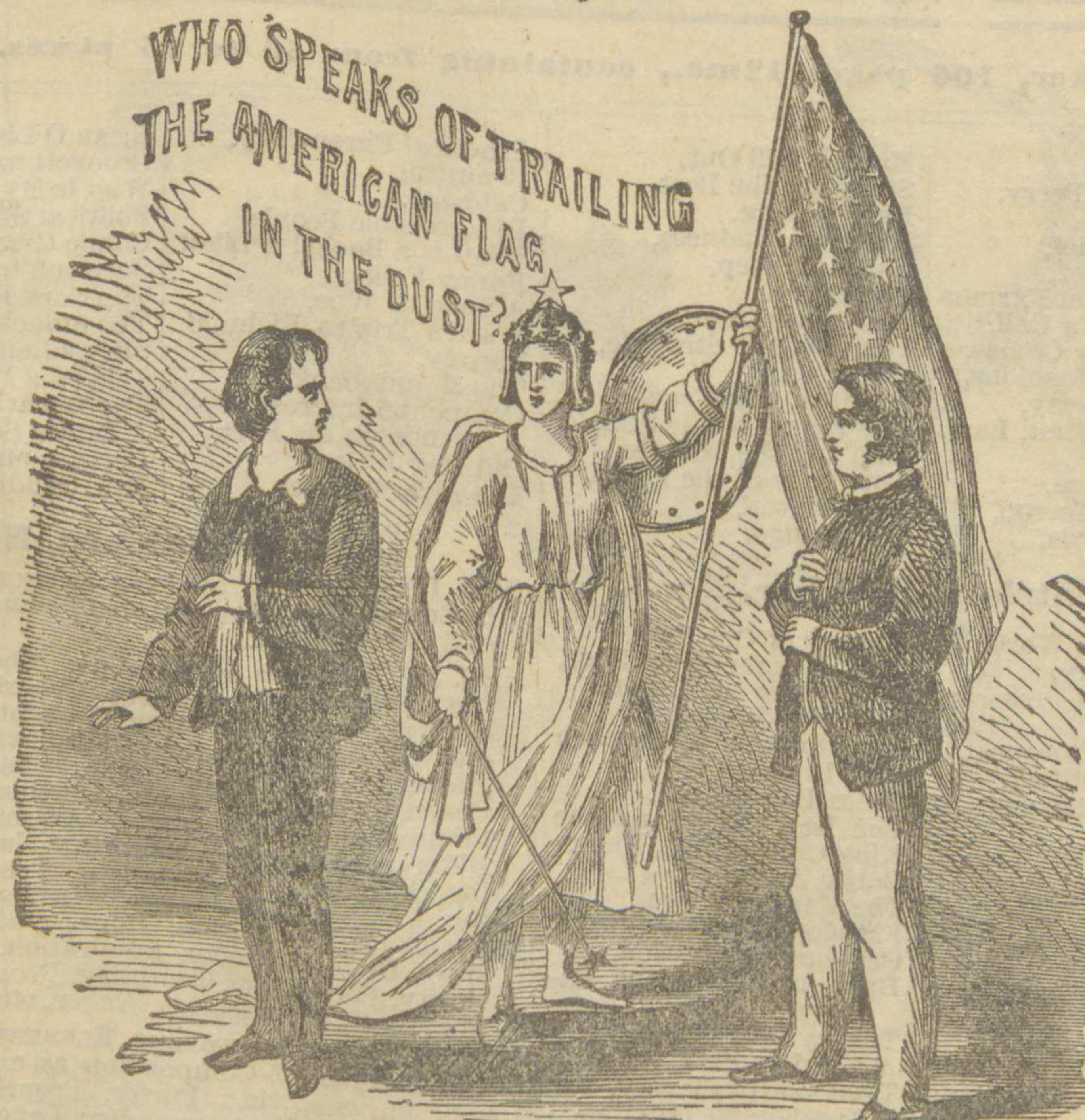
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